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Journal des débats (Hansard)

Monday 20 October 2008

Lundi 20 octobre 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 20 October 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 20 octobre 2008

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the Islamic Prayer.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I'd like to introduce to the Legislature my sister, who is visiting from Winnipeg, Manitoba, and works for the justice department there: Sarah Gravelle MacKenzie. Sarah, Welcome.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I'd like to introduce Mr. and Mrs. Bacon, who are from my constituency, who came to enjoy House proceedings today.

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I'd like to introduce Paul and Joni Moffatt from Hamilton, who are going to enjoy a day in the Legislature today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

GOVERNMENT INVESTMENTS

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Minister of Economic Development. Minister, with great fanfare, over three and a half years ago, the McGuinty government announced the advanced manufacturing investment strategy, AMIS, as a cure-all remedy to stop the bleeding of the over 200,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs in Ontario. Minister, can you tell the House how much of that \$500 million has been distributed these past three-plus years?

Hon. Michael Bryant: I'm very happy to talk about the investments that the government has made over the past few years.

This is a strategy, as the member knows, that sees this jurisdiction make investments in business capital and human capital to try and help make the auto manufacturing sector even more competitive. That is our approach, to make those investments, to make those loans.

I understand the Conservative approach is a different one. It is not to make those investments; it is not to make those loans; it is to engage in deep tax cuts and engage in deep spending cuts. The problem with that approach is that it would not in fact see the retention of those plants, the retention of those jobs, the retention of that auto

manufacturing industry, and it certainly wouldn't see it grow.

So we will continue with that strategy, and I'll be happy to share with the member all of the success stories that have arisen from it.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I know the minister is new to this portfolio, and congratulations to him on this new portfolio.

The minister, if he doesn't know, should know that of the \$500 million that you allocated over three and a half years ago, less than 20%, less than \$1 out of \$5, has actually been allocated into the spending program. So what we have instead is Dalton McGuinty choosing to raise taxes on all businesses to among the highest in all of North America on new business investment, to increase red tape with each cabinet meeting, to increase energy rates to among the least competitive with our competing jurisdictions. And then you choose a small amount of money to give back to individual firms: less than 19% subscribed. This may attract large crowds at Liberal fundraisers and may get you a good photo op before an election campaign, but what it's done is chase 200,000-plus well-paying manufacturing jobs from our province. Is 19% over three and a half years considered a success story from the McGuinty government?

Hon. Michael Bryant: This program thus far has involved \$90 million of investments, generating \$884 million in new investments. It's partnerships. The member suggests that it is in fact taxpayer dollars poorly spent; in fact, it's the opposite. By leveraging the \$90 million, we see in fact the retention or creation of 4,000 jobs. These are jobs that would not have stayed, would not have grown, would in fact have gone elsewhere to another jurisdiction that would have made those investments. So with the protection or creation of 4,000 new jobs this government has advanced its strategy of making, yes, direct investments in partnerships with the auto manufacturing sector in order to keep that heart of the manufacturing centre here in Ontario going and to keep those jobs here in Ontario and to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Final supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I know the minister is new and he wants to distance himself from the failures of the last three and a half years, but surely to goodness, Minister, when you heralded \$500 million in spending that was going to be the cure-all to all that ails manufacturing in the province of Ontario—and only \$1 in \$5 of those

dollars has been allocated over three and a half years. Look also, for example, at your two forest programs, the guarantee program and the granting program: less than 18% of the \$500 million in that sector was ever sent out. So your policies of higher taxes, of runaway spending, of higher hydro rates, and then your grant programs that can't even get money out the door—hasn't the McGuinty government policy been an abysmal failure when it comes to creating jobs for hard-working Ontario families?

Hon. Michael Bryant: No. In fact, this government has not taken the advice of the previous Conservative government, which left us with a massive debt and deficit. Instead, the government tackled the fiscal challenge at the same time as undertaking an approach that is fundamentally different from the Conservative approach. It is an approach that invests in people, skills, infrastructure, education, health care, and yes, directly partnering with companies, with labour in order to retain and create jobs. That approach would not have seen any of that revenue come into the cupboards of the province of Ontario. Because of the deep tax cuts, it would have meant deep spending cuts, and if that party, if that approach had been taken by this government we would right now in Ontario be—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Minister of Economic Development. Let me tell you one more time that you increased taxes on working families and seniors, you increased taxes on small businesses, you took \$1 billion of taxpayers' money for these investment accounts, and only about 18% or 19% of that money has actually found a home over three and a half years. Even in Dalton McGuinty's watered-down educational standards, that's still a failure to help out companies and working families in the province of Ontario.

I'll ask you, Minister, now: Your newest wave, the Next Generation of Jobs Fund—you said 200 days ago that this would be a program to help create jobs in Ontario. Why is it that only one announcement has been made on this very important fund?

Hon. Michael Bryant: I appreciate the member's thoughts on the communications strategy. The point here is the investments that have been made. The purpose of the Next Generation of Jobs Fund is similar to the approach of the advanced manufacturing loan program. In fact, this sees direct grants that are made with companies. That means jobs. If we do not make these direct grants, if we do not make these direct investments, you will not see the advances in innovation and advances in technology and you will see jobs go elsewhere. The member's approach is to chase those jobs out of the province of Ontario. That is not our approach. Our approach is to invest in those workers and jobs in Ontario, and we will continue to take that approach.

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: What appears to be the McGuinty government's approach on creating small business—their advice seems to be to buy a large business and watch it shrink, thanks to Dalton McGuinty's failed economic policies.

Minister, you've made one sole announcement on this so-called Next Generation of Jobs Fund. The programs from three years ago—barely \$1 out of \$5 has flowed. That's an abysmal failure. I think you should just recognize that.

You were going to clean things up; that's what you said when you became a minister. So please tell us today how you're going to do that.

When it comes to your retraining program, your much-heralded Second Career strategy, out there for six months, you were going to help 230,000 people who have lost jobs in the province of Ontario—230,000 lost manufacturing jobs. Minister, why is it that only 600 people are enrolled in that program?

Hon. Michael Bryant: The question was about the Next Generation of Jobs fund, and I'm happy to talk about that. I'm happy as well to talk about the investment in skills and training.

But let's be clear: This government's investments in partnering in business that creates jobs, the investments in human capital and business capital that creates jobs—that party refers to it as corporate welfare. That party in fact denigrates the approach, denigrates those jobs, denigrates those skills, denigrates those industries.

What does he think would happen to those companies and jobs if we took that approach, if we saw these investments and partnerships as corporate welfare, as he refers to them? They would go away. In fact, you would see a situation where infrastructure was not invested in; education would not be where it is today; the health care system would not be where it is today, attracting jobs; and he would have chased all that capital out of the province of Ontario. That is his approach. That is not our approach. Our approach is to make investments in the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: You wonder what planet this minister calls home. Where are the jobs going? Under Dalton McGuinty, they're leaving the province in droves. Some 200,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs have left Welland, Goderich and the Hamilton area, thanks to your failed economic policies.

We as Progressive Conservatives have faith in the small-business sector in the province of Ontario. We have faith in the great entrepreneurs of our province. The problem is that your high taxes, your increasing red tape and your hydro policies are throttling the creativity and the innovation of the province of Ontario. So now Ontario, once the leader in all of Canada, is dead last when it comes to growth and job creation in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario.

Minister, will we see in this week's economic statement, finally, a reduction in the tax and red tape barriers, to help our small businesses succeed? This is Small Business Week, Minister. Will you help them succeed and create jobs in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Michael Bryant: In fact, the approach of the Conservatives is very much to throttle the creativity, innovation, skills and infrastructure of the province of Ontario. They would have had none of that revenue to make investments in those companies. Why? Because of their approach, which would have meant the spending cuts, and they would have throttled innovation.

What this government has done is make investments in innovation. It has made investments in productivity. This government has made direct investments into the manufacturing sector. And so, the Next Generation of Jobs Fund sees \$8 million invested in 6N Silicon to support a \$50-million expansion, creating 84 new jobs and retaining 16 in the development of silicon for the solar industry. That is this government's approach. That party would have chased 6N Silicon right out of this country—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

MANUFACTURING AND FORESTRY SECTOR JOBS

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Acting Premier: The evidence grows every day that the McGuinty government has no idea how to address Ontario's growing jobs crisis. We saw, not many months ago, the McGuinty government dole \$235 million out to General Motors, and then General Motors closes its truck plant in Oshawa, laying off thousands of workers. One would have thought that the government would have learned from that, but lo and behold, last Friday, we find that the McGuinty government boasts it is contributing a few million to Abitibi-Bowater in Thunder Bay at the same time that Abitibi-Bowater announces they are laying off some workers and shortening the work time of others.

When is the McGuinty government going to learn that if you're going to provide money to corporations, you should at least get some job guarantees?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I'm pleased to be able to respond to the opposition leader. We were there to help Abitibi with their kraft pulp paper mill. The idea was that we were giving them \$1.6 million towards a grant; they were investing \$10 million into that mill. The idea here again is to be able to sustain jobs.

There is no question that right across the far north, dealing with the forestry sector, there are extraordinary challenges when there isn't a market to sell the products that they are making. Abitibi was very clear when they made the reductions. They said they had a surplus in terms of what they were able to sell. It's a liquidity issue; there's no market for it. What we're doing is strategically looking at how we can help them reduce their costs.

Overall, it's the entire company we're trying to help, where possible, to make that transition as to when the times will change.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: I'm sure people in Thunder Bay will be interested to learn from the McGuinty Minister of Natural Resources that they now live in the far north.

The issue is this: On the one hand, you have a community where people are hard-pressed. Thousands have been laid off from their manufacturing jobs, part of it because the McGuinty government insists on driving industrial hydro rates through the roof, part of it because the McGuinty government seems to have no understanding of the forest sector. Then the McGuinty government comes out and boasts, "Oh, we're giving some money to Bowater," and the same day Bowater announces, "We're laying off workers, and other workers are going to work less time." How is that a successful job-sustaining policy when you give money to corporations and the same day they announce they are laying off workers? How is that a successful job-sustaining policy by the McGuinty government?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: In fact, this government has given Thunder Bay alone some \$17.5 million to help them through a variety of initiatives. We are, under way, looking at a research and development centre. We're putting in additional resources because we know that when a company like AbitibiBowater is dealing with their overall strategic planning, part of their responsibility is to look at the entirety. We also put \$20 million into Fort Frances and Rainy River to help them with a new cogeneration plant.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: Is he in favour of that?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: Oh, I doubt it.

Mr. Speaker, my colleague was asking whether or not the opposition leader was in favour, but unfortunately I don't think he's in favour of much of anything in the north.

Having said that, the opportunity here is that we can work strategically through the prosperity fund and through our loan fund, and we can support those companies, where possible, to help them as they deal with a very difficult time in transition as we—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: I want the McGuinty government to know what I'm not in favour of. I'm not in favour of the thousands of workers in Thunder Bay who used to work in the forest sector who've been laid off under the McGuinty government. I'm not in favour of the workers in Red Rock who've been laid off and the workers in Chapleau who've been laid off and in Longlac who've been laid off, in Ignace, Atikokan, Dryden, and Sioux Lookout and Kenora. I'm not in favour of that, and I refuse to accept a government that then goes out and boasts about doling out more money to a corporation, and in the meantime, in the same community, workers are being laid off by that corporation.

When is the McGuinty government going to get it? If you're going to dole out money to corporations, at least have the common decency to get a jobs guarantee before you dole out the money. When is the McGuinty government going to do that?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I wonder if the member from Kenora-Rainy River had the same conversation when he closed 14 mills between 1990 and 1995. It seems that he indeed has a lapse of memory when it comes to these initiatives.

Hon. David Caplan: He got hit by a puck in the head.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister of Health, withdraw the comment, please.

Hon. David Caplan: I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: The fact of the matter is, we have made extraordinary investments in the north. We will continue to make those investments where strategically possible to do so. We will continue to invite and encourage more forest-added products to come into the north. We just had a very successful conference, where we had over 200 people participate, to look at how we can add additional manufacturing into the north. This government isn't sitting down—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question. The leader of the third party.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I'd be happy to put my record of sustaining jobs in the forest sector in northern Ontario against the McGuinty government's record any day.

1050

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Acting Premier: As Ontario is losing hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs, the Premier is planning yet another junket to China. The McGuinty government says this is going to add new jobs. Well, as I add it up, it seems that the Premier and his ministers have made about four junkets to China in the last year, while Ontario has lost literally tens of thousands of jobs. Can the McGuinty government tell us what green technologies you are going to market in China that are going to sustain jobs when you've lost jobs with virtually every trip you've made to China in the last year?

Hon. George Smitherman: I think that at the heart of it, the people of the province of Ontario understand that as an export-oriented jurisdiction, it's absolutely necessary as a core element and function of the provincial government that we continue to look for opportunities to broaden markets all around the world. Obviously, when people look to broadening in emerging markets, most people have China on their list. I'm not really sure of the mentality of the honourable member with respect to being a trade-oriented jurisdiction and the responsibilities of the government, but we do think it's very, very important that the Premier of the province represent the province in seeking to develop new markets alongside a

wide variety of Ontario businesses, and we will continue to take this opportunity.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The reason I ask this question is because there are some possible jobs in green technology. For example, Quebec has attracted a Norwegian solar panel company, Renewable Energy Corp., to build a solar panel plant, a silicon materials plant, that will create 300 jobs in Quebec. Not only that, a wind turbine manufacturer is setting up shop in Quebec, creating hundreds of good high-technology jobs. Here in Ontario, though, the government routinely announces, for example, wind power projects, renewable energy technology, and then they're cancelled because the government can't get its act together to make them happen.

Why would you go to China to sell green technology when you can't even get it off the ground in Ontario after you've made the announcement?

Hon. George Smitherman: The honourable member's statement that we haven't got wind power off the ground in Ontario is a sad reflection of the fact that he obviously doesn't travel; that he hasn't been north of Shelburne, Ontario, to Melancthon, where soon we'll open the second part of a very, very big wind project. He hasn't been to Canada's largest wind farm, located in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. He hasn't been to the shore of the Great Lakes along Lake Huron and Lake Erie, where more wind resource has been brought to light.

Indeed, he speaks about a circumstance with EPCOR. We're disappointed that they haven't moved forward, but 16 out of 19 of those contracts which have been made available to companies in response to our renewables program have gone forward, and we're working very carefully with the Ontario Power Authority at the moment to make sure that Ontario continues to find investment in renewable forms of energy.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I know the McGuinty government wants to skip over this, but last week a \$300-million wind farm contract in Goderich was cancelled. Why? Despite the government announcing it and re-announcing it and reannouncing it, they can't get it off the ground. This is not the first; this is the second such contract. We've got others that are able to produce electricity, but they can't get it to market because they lack transmission.

But it all ignores the real issue. Quebec is actually building wind power turbines now. Quebec is actually building solar equipment. They're creating the green technologies. Here, the McGuinty government is failing to create these green technologies. Why do you need to go to China? Quebec is already showing you how to do it right here. Why not go to Quebec and see what they're doing and duplicate some of that so you can create real green technology jobs here in Canada?

Hon. George Smitherman: It's really good to have another question from the member, who demonstrates today that he's prepared to stand up in the Legislature

and talk about these things, but he hasn't been prepared to vote in favour of these things. As an example, he speaks about transmission capability. That's why we're in the midst of making a \$650-million investment, the kind that he wasn't responsible enough to make, to enhance our transmission capabilities from the shore of Lake Huron to the markets where the energy is required. This is yet a further example of the investments we're making and the opportunities that that unlocks with respect to more renewable energy production in the province of Ontario. On Wolfe Island, at Kingston—and the list continues to go on—we're seeing extraordinarily big investment because people understand that Ontario is a good place to invest in the development of further renewable energy. I encourage the honourable member to stand by and watch for the announcements and openings to occur.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a question for the Minister of Labour. Minister, for your information, this is Small Business Week in Canada. Is it true that you're going to penalize small business, forcing them to take on extra costs, by making workers' compensation mandatory for all construction workers?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: What this proposed legislation, if passed, would do is actually level the playing field for business, employers and employees, and make sure that we can address the health and safety concerns that exist in the construction sector. What we're doing is making sure that we can address the underground economic activity that does take place in the construction sector; there are some that are not playing by the rules. This proposed legislation would make sure that everybody plays by the rules. That's helping small business, that's helping big business and that's helping our employers.

I'll have more to say in the supplementary.

Mr. Norm Miller: Minister, there are a lot of things in this world that you and your government do not control, but this new policy is something you do control. We're in uncertain economic times at this moment, yet you and your government have selected this moment to penalize small businesses in the construction sector and further jeopardize some 90,000 construction workers' jobs.

Judith Andrew, director of provincial affairs for the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, says this: "This is a very anti-small business agenda." She goes on to say, "I cannot begin to say how disturbed we are to have (Labour) Minister (Peter) Fonseca put forward this crazy policy."

With jobs and workers leaving for other provinces and the uncertainty in the economy, why are you hurting small businesses now?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: What I will say to the member is that we will work with all stakeholders on this legislation. If passed, it would come into full implementation in 2012. I will meet with Judith and with others to make

sure that this addresses what it's being put in place to address, and that is the underground economic activity that takes place by some bad actors in construction, to make sure there is an even, level playing field for all those in construction, and primarily to address the health and safety of all those workers who go on to those construction sites every day. I would hope the member would be on the side of all those hard-working Ontarians to make sure that we can keep them healthy and safe, and that he would support this legislation.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. Last week, I asked the minister to reinstate the temporary care assistance funding to grandparents raising their at-risk grandchildren. Instead, she changed the rules and callously said that these grandparents could apply for welfare. Then she denied the rule change. But if she doesn't believe me, I have the changes right here, and I'll be glad to send them over to you.

Will this minister reverse the changes so that all grandparents raising their children's kids qualify for temporary care assistance?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I want to thank the member from the third party for his question. First of all, let me say on behalf of all Ontarians that we thank the grandparents who believe they have a responsibility towards their grandchildren when they are in difficulty; we thank them for doing so. Our government supports the grandparents through this temporary care assistance when the grandparents and children are in need in the short term, and through a host of other supports in the long term.

Temporary care assistance can provide up to \$5,000 a year for grandparents with two children. Our government is providing \$12.8 million this year through this initiative, up 14% since last year.

1100

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: Well, that's a wonderful statement, but apparently many of these grandparents don't even qualify for welfare. Governments are supposed to help people, not hurt them. Ontarians across this province are outraged. They're saying this is a McGuinty government that doesn't care: "What is this lady thinking?" "Shame on McGuinty." "I would like to see Madame Meilleur live on welfare."

Grandparents are losing their homes, their retirement savings and going to food banks. Why won't this minister do the right thing and reverse the changes to the temporary care assistance directives to include coverage for these struggling grandparents and their grandchildren? Why won't you do it?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: First of all, let me say that the rules were not changed. There rules were always applicable when this party was in power.

The grandparents are also entitled to Ontario child benefits, where we're helping 1.3 million children. They're also entitled to the national child benefit supplement, and they are entitled to the assistance for children with severe disabilities. On top of that, this year we gave a 2% increase to TCA, those who are receiving it, and this party voted against it. Shame on you.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. In talking to a number of our partners in the health care sector, wait times still remain both the top priority and concern across the board, particularly with surgeons, who want more operating time and want to reduce their wait times. Our government has made significant strides when it comes to reducing wait times in our hospitals.

What is your ministry doing to keep Ontario from losing surgeons to Alberta and the US because they don't have enough operating time, and can you please share with this House what our plan is to keep reducing wait times in the province of Ontario?

Hon. David Caplan: I want to thank the member from Hamilton Mountain for the question.

Just this past Friday, I was in the great riding of Ottawa West-Nepean at Queensway Carleton Hospital where I had the privilege to announce that this government is expanding the wait time strategy to include additional funding for general surgery.

In an effort to continue to improve our health care system, to deliver the care to Ontarians in a timely way and provide our hospitals with the resources they need to meet these goals, we have established and asked a general surgery expert panel to identify the types of general surgeries that would receive additional funding. The panel identified anorectal, gallbladder, groin hernia repair, ventral hernia repair and intestinal surgery as five priority areas based on the fact that these were the most common types of general surgeries in the province of Ontario between 2004 and 2006. The \$11.6-million investment will allow all surgical patients to have access to wait time information and have an understanding—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I have, on an ongoing basis, heard from my constituents on issues related to health care. Specifically, they have commented on wait times and how they are going down in my community. It is clear that one of the top issues in my riding is wait times. In fact, recently, I attended the annual Day in Arthroplasty hosted in Hamilton, where the discussion about wait times was very positive.

Could the minister remind the members of this House and my riding of Hamilton Mountain exactly how this announcement and our overall wait times strategy will benefit and continue to benefit patients and the system in general?

Hon. David Caplan: That is a great question because the expansion of the wait times strategy and the website

will help ensure that Ontarians receive timely and appropriate access to those expanded services. Both patients and physicians will have the ability to identify which areas of the province have the shortest wait times and what is considered to be the appropriate waiting time for these procedures. By making this information public via the website, patients, in consultation with their physicians, will be able to make more informed decisions regarding where they receive treatment.

When it comes to delivering health care, our approach has been, and will continue to be, about building a partnership between those who deliver care and those who receive it, so that together we ensure that we are meeting the health care needs of Ontario. We have undertaken enormous work and lowered wait times right across the board. I look forward to even greater results in the days, weeks and months ahead.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Mr. Frank Klees: To the Minister of Energy: I want to follow up on a question that the leader of the third party put to the minister regarding the abandonment of a \$300-million investment in the province of Ontario for clean energy. The minister brushes this off as though it's not a big issue, but no company abandons a \$300-million investment for which they have already spent many hundreds of thousands of dollars for no reason at all, and I would hope the minister is taking note.

The approvals and planning process for these projects is cumbersome, it lacks timelines, and there is no coordination. I would ask the minister this: Given the cancellation of this project and given the costs that are being incurred by many others in the process, will the minister tell the House what specific steps he will take to fix what is now a costly and frustrating planning and approvals process in this—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. George Smitherman: In answer to questions from the member from the third party, it was his characterization that there hasn't been any wind development in the province of Ontario that I took issue with, because I've travelled and I've seen it and I see the results of it working to power homes and businesses across Ontario every single day.

I do recognize very clearly that, with respect to the decision taken by EPCOR, there is, explicit and implicit, an opportunity for us to do a better job of coordinating the various approvals. But I want to reiterate to the honourable member that of the 19 large-scale renewable projects that have had a contract available for them, 16 of those 19 projects have come to light. It's a good record but we need to build upon it, and I look forward in supplementary to giving the honourable member some further information about how I'm intending to respond to the opportunities that we have to enhance the regulatory processes in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Frank Klees: We've seen the minister's \$60-billion plan for energy supply for the province and we

encourage the components of clean energy in that plan. What we are concerned about—and I'm pleased to hear the minister's response. I look forward to hearing some specifics in terms of what he plans to do to ensure that future projects will have a process that is clearly delineated, that does not contain the duplications and the bureaucracy and the frustrations, so that we don't have a repeat of the EPCOR abandonment of a major multi-million-dollar project. So I look forward to hearing specifically from the minister what steps he is going to take to ensure that Ontario's planning and approvals process is streamlined so that these projects will not only be encouraged but will come to fruition.

Hon. George Smitherman: At the heart of the matter is a wide variety of regulatory approvals. That's well known. We've got a variety of agencies in the energy sector—the Independent Electricity System Operator, Hydro One and the Ontario Power Authority—we've got municipal approvals, and we've got environmental approvals. It is necessary to find mechanisms that will allow those complicated processes to be better aligned. In the time since I've become minister, I could tell the honourable member that I've taken many, many opportunities in working with those very same partners to enhance the process. I will look forward to opportunities relatively soon, in engagement with other government ministries and with those energy agencies, to move forward with mechanisms that streamline the current circumstances.

But I remind the honourable member that renewable energy was an option when his party was in power. They did not take advantage of it. When we came to office, there were 15 megawatts of renewable energy. We've substantially increased that, with much more in the pipeline, which we look forward—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Last Thursday, at a meeting attended by the minister's director of the laboratory branch, I learned of his government's decision to terminate funding to Ontario hospitals for community lab services. For weeks, I've asked for clarification of the minister's role in the closure of these community lab services. When does the minister intend to confirm that those public, not-for-profit, hospital-based community lab services are being terminated?

Hon. David Caplan: The member should be aware that we are working with our partners in the health care sector to ensure that Ontario's health care system is and remains responsive and that it continues to meet patients' needs.

The case that the member refers to is in Muskoka, and it was a pilot project which began in 1997. It was evaluated independently and the review took place. An outside consulting firm was used to assess the service

delivery model as a part of the laboratory restructuring initiative. Upon consultation and review, the ministry and the Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare hospital together determined that the best option to maintain local service was to accept the review's recommendation to adopt the same model of community laboratory services that are used in hospitals right across Ontario.

1110

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: This is not what we get when we talk to those executive directors of the hospitals whose services are being cut. Ontarians want access to high-quality health services, but they want it to remain public and not-for-profit. Handing over half a billion dollars' worth of community lab services to large, private for-profit corporations goes against public not-for-profit health care.

This minister can assure Ontarians that his government supports public not-for-profit health care by providing adequate funding for community lab services provided by small hospitals across Ontario. My question is, why won't he do it?

Hon. David Caplan: The member, in her question, says that hospital services have been cut. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, \$11.1 billion in new investment—a 37% increase—in funding to our hospitals has occurred in the last five years as a result of efforts of this government.

The member opposite asks: Will we continue the way that hospitals have been organized under NDP governments and Conservative governments? The answer is yes. In fact, we will have the same arrangement which has provided the high-quality care that Ontarians have come to expect that has existed for decades within our hospital system. We are going to work closely with our partners at a local level to make sure that those services are appropriately in place.

The commitment that this government has to publicly delivered and supported health care is unmatched by any of the other—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

CHILD CARE

Mrs. Laura Albanese: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Each week, my office is contacted by parents who are seeking licensed child care for their young children. The need for child care is present not only in one particular area of York South-Weston, but across the various neighbourhoods of the community I represent. Quality licensed child care is a priority and a benefit for all families. However, the ability to receive a subsidy for a child care space is especially important to the families in my community who are struggling to meet the costs of quality licensed child care while working to provide for their families.

To the minister: What actions is the government taking to help create more child care spaces and more fee

subsidies to help parents pay for the cost of the child care?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I would like to thank the member from York South–Weston for her continuing advocacy for her constituents on the issue of child care, among others.

Our government has two goals when it comes to child care: improving the quality of child care and improving access to child care. Since coming to office, we've created more than 22,000 new licensed spaces. In total, 50,000 spaces have been created since we were elected in 2003. That means that 50,000 more kids have access to quality, regulated child care than when we were elected.

We've also made child care more affordable. We've introduced a new subsidy eligibility system, which is fair and consistent, to replace the patchwork of different rules which municipalities across the province previously used. Through our investments, we've provided 20,000 more children with subsidies—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: It's clear that the government is taking the issue of quality licensed child care seriously and is committed to further improving the system in Ontario. Residents in my riding were disappointed that the federal government cancelled the early learning and child care agreement in 2006. The cancellation of this agreement dramatically reduced Ontario's ability to invest in child care.

To the minister: What actions has the government of Ontario taken to raise the issue of child care and early learning with the government of Canada, and how is Ontario moving forward in the absence of this agreement?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We're working hard for Ontario families, even after the federal government cancelled our child care agreement, costing Ontario families \$1.1 billion in new funding over three years and thousands of new spaces. We continue to advocate for the federal government to invest in early learning and child care because we know it's a priority for Ontario families.

Not only have we invested an additional \$25 million this year, to provide 3,000 more subsidies on top of the 20,000 already created; we're also moving ahead with full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds. The Premier has appointed Dr. Charles Pascal as our early learning adviser. He will provide advice how best to implement the full-day learning to provide our kids with the best start in life.

We know there's more work to do, but we're proud of what we've accomplished. We look forward to working with the federal government to further strengthen child care in Ontario.

VIOLENT CRIME

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Attorney General. I rise today to follow-up on a question previously asked by the leader of the official opposition regarding the deaths of two Toronto women who were murdered last week. Our leader is attending their funerals

today. Attorney General, as you know, the crown did not appeal an earlier decision to grant bail to the accused, who has proven in the past to be a threat to public safety. Attorney General, why was this decision not appealed?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I know that the sympathies of all the members of the House and members of the community are with the family and friends of those who've been struck by this terrible tragedy on every day, and in particular today.

As my friend should know, in this case there's a limit to what I can say because there are publication bans in place and there is a legal proceeding under way. I know that the honourable member would not want us to do anything that would jeopardize a prosecution.

I will say, and I'll speak to it in more detail in my supplementary, that the crown's position in all cases, when it comes to the question of bail, is that public safety is paramount. That is our approach in all cases, and it was an approach that is particularly important in the serious—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Attorney General, the accused was out on bail at the time of these murders for previous charges of aggravated sexual assault, sexual assault with a weapon, and attempted choking. These are really serious charges. This accused had a history of non-compliance and breach of probation orders, yet despite that, bail was granted after the preliminary hearing. As a result, two innocent women died unnecessarily. It's decisions like these that encourage a huge loss of faith in Ontario's justice system. Attorney General, what can you say about this? How could this have happened?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: To repeat, the crown's position in all cases is that public safety is paramount, and in this case there are publication bans in existence, and I know nobody would want us to do anything to jeopardize a prosecution that is outstanding.

We do know, in this case, that there was an original bail hearing before a justice of the peace, there was then a preliminary hearing and a bail review before a judge, and an order was made by that judge. Publication bans in existence prevent me from speaking more, because we don't want to jeopardize the prosecution. But our public safety is paramount in all cases—this and every other.

LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. Minister, you'll know that the Xstrata metallurgical site has now been on strike for some two or three weeks. Can you tell me and tell this House and, more importantly, the people on the picket line why you're allowing management of the Ontario Northland Railway to cross that picket line?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I'm not aware of the details of the situation, other than, of course, I understand they are on strike.

The ONTC, as the member knows, is an independent organization that does receive funding for various parts

of its function, which we are proud to support, but we are not in a position to direct the corporation. I'm not familiar with that actual piece of information, but I will certainly be looking forward to looking into it.

1120

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That's a pretty scary thought, that the minister who's responsible for the ONTC and ultimately the ONR is not aware that you're using your managers to cross the picket line to train the management at Xstrata to run the rail system that runs ore from the mine to the metallurgical site.

I'll say again: Are you prepared to say in this House today that the Liberal government will stop scabbing the picket line at the Xstrata worksite?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Again, I am certainly prepared to look into the situation. I do not have the information that the member has, and I'm therefore not prepared to confirm it because I'm not able to do so. But I will certainly ask my officials and look into it myself to see what the situation is. Obviously, we're hoping that the situation can be resolved in a positive way.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Bill Mauro: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. Collisions with wild animals not only result in serious vehicle damage but also personal injury and even death. We are very aware of this, and Thunder Bay is one of five areas in Ontario with the highest numbers of collisions with wildlife. Too often we see stories in the news and hear from the public on this issue. Thunder Bay is fortunate enough to be surrounded by lakes, rivers and vast green spaces that are home to a variety of wildlife. However, with all this beauty comes the responsibility of being aware of your surroundings.

I'm hoping the Minister of Transportation can share with this House and with my constituents in the riding of Thunder Bay—Atikokan what drivers across Ontario can do to avoid the dangers posed by colliding with animals who have wandered onto the road.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I would like to thank the member for an excellent question. The problem of wildlife collisions is not solely in northern Ontario, as people know. In fact, Ottawa, Simcoe county, Middlesex, Lanark county and Thunder Bay all have these challenges. Drivers can take precautions to reduce collisions, save lives and protect wild animals by being aware. They can scan the road ahead from shoulder to shoulder; if there's an animal beside the road, slow down and pass carefully. Watch for the yellow wildlife warning signs. These indicate areas of increased risk. If possible, use high beams at night and watch for the glowing eyes of animals. If you see a wild animal crossing the road, stop safely and remember that where one animal crosses, others may follow. Finally, never swerve suddenly. This could cause your vehicle to go out of control and result in a more serious collision.

The province has taken a number of other steps that I will anticipate may come in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Bill Mauro: Again, my question is for the Minister of Transportation, and I want to thank him for those recommendations.

However, the message does not seem to be getting out to all drivers. Research shows that on average there are 14,000 vehicle and wild animal collisions reported annually in Ontario. That works out to a collision every 37 minutes. These types of collisions just should not happen. They cause death, unnecessary property damage and serious injuries.

I understand that the ministry has various public education campaigns to raise awareness on this issue, including a Watch for Wildlife brochure, posters, tray liners and a media campaign throughout northern and eastern Ontario. Can the minister please share with this House what else he and the Ministry of Transportation have been doing to help keep animals from wandering onto the road?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Right now, October through December, is when the risk of collision is at its highest, as members would know. It's the fall mating and migration season and also the hunting season, a time when animals can sometimes be found on the roads more often. This government is always looking for new ways to minimize the danger, and that's why we've implemented a number of initiatives: posting warning signs in areas with a history of collisions; removing roadside brush to improve visibility for drivers; installing fencing along major highways; and installing highway lighting to improve visibility at night.

Also, the ministry has additional mitigation features: crossing opportunities for wildlife on highways, draining salty ponds adjacent to the highways, and implementing radio-activated wildlife detection systems. We'll continue to work on this because it's a serious—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: To the Minister of Education: Minister, time and time again, you stand in your place and tell us that you're looking into issues that are raised here in the Legislature and that are important to all Ontarians. Well, the leaves have turned and—tick-tock, Minister—it's officially fall now and we are still left waiting for your delayed response on many issues that matter to Ontarians. How much later will we have to wait? How much later will the parents have to wait? How much later will the educators have to wait for your overdue report on safe schools?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The report on safe schools that is being delivered by the safe schools action team will be delivered on time this fall.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: Well, it's delayed, and I think that file deserves an F because it's not on time and there are consequences.

Not only is this report overdue, Minister, but you have refused valuable input from many students and parents whose safety was jeopardized on your watch. Minister, you have clearly stacked the committee to get the answers you want to hear. We have been told by an official in your ministry that the consulting process has been concluded, so this input can no longer be considered.

Minister, where is this fall report, and are you trying to bury this report?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The report will be delivered this fall. I'm not sure exactly what the member opposite is getting at. My parliamentary assistant, the member for Guelph, has been working with the safe schools action team. Remember, this is a safe schools action team that delivered the recommendations on changing the safe schools legislation that was so flawed, which was put in place by the members opposite when they were in government.

I look forward to the report, which is going to be looking at gender violence, sexual assault, homophobia—issues that have not been tackled by governments in this province for a very long time. On top of that report, we've been investing in resources for schools. So \$43 million more has flowed to schools this year—to priority high schools, to hire more psychologists and social workers, the actual people who will keep our schools safe, the kinds of resources that schools need on—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

MUNICIPAL FINANCES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. This is the start of Local Government Week, when we celebrate, promote and support our cities and towns. The government has created a webpage with posters and leaflets—it's very beautiful, in fact—and it encourages young people to get involved with their municipalities.

All of the feel-good posters and promotional campaigns do not change the basic fact that local governments are being extremely shortchanged by this McGuinty government. Will the minister indicate very clearly today what level of new funding Ontario's municipalities can expect in Wednesday's economic statement? Will there be measures to finally fix the inequities of provincial downloading?

Hon. Jim Watson: I thank the member for recognizing the start of Local Government Week. I know it's on all members' calendars and to-do lists to celebrate the good work that our municipal partners do.

I'm very pleased that already the Minister of Finance has announced some excellent news for the municipal sector, including when the Premier was in Ottawa at the AMO conference and announced a record \$1.1 billion in infrastructure funding for the municipal sector. I'm particularly pleased with the work that we have been doing with respect to building the relationship that was

really quite tattered when we took office in 2003, including the uploading of ODP, which is 100% uploaded now, and ODSP, where the uploading begins on January 1 next year. That will save municipalities over—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The minister knows very well that a one-time capital influx is not going to help municipalities in a systemic way with the problems they have from downloading. The government's municipal finance report in fact is long, long overdue. Municipalities across Ontario have a mountain of unpaid provincial bills and they face a real cash crunch if the McGuinty government keeps delaying and delaying on their announcement about helping municipalities and municipalities keep paying and paying and paying provincial bills.

Will there be substantial relief, systemic relief, for Ontario's towns and cities announced in Wednesday's economic statement, or will the government call another big stall once again?

Hon. Jim Watson: I tend to side more with the mayor of Hamilton and his take on what the investing in Ontario fund was all about when he said, "We are both privileged and proud to be a partner with the McGuinty government, and we are committed to continue to work together in efforts to increase economic development, create well-paying employment opportunities and focus on building new infrastructure."

1130

Maybe it takes a New Democrat to criticize \$1.1 billion, but the good people of Hamilton have benefited to the tune of \$48 million in new funds for infrastructure in her community. When you take a look at where we began in 2003 with \$1.1 billion in funding, that figure is climbing to \$2.8 billion by 2011, and we will continue to do more to help our municipal partners because we respect—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Bob Delaney: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Minister, we all know the importance of eating locally produced food. It benefits our local economy in rural Ontario as well as our environment. This is especially true these days, when food from elsewhere has, at times, been proven not to be as safe as what Ontario consumers expect. Farmers' markets, however, are a very important part of this particular issue. There are numerous farmers' markets in the western GTA area that operate during the summer and fall.

Would the minister please tell the House what our government is doing to support local farmers' markets?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I think it is important that the people of Ontario understand what we're doing in partnership to support farmers' markets, so I thank the honourable member for the question.

On June 24 of this year, we actually had a farmers' market on the lawn of the Legislative Assembly. It was a

wonderful opportunity for people in this city to truly appreciate the range of products that are available. At that time I was also able to make an announcement of \$4 million over the next four years to expand the number of farmers' markets, on-farm markets and pick-your-own operations. This funding is going to be provided to Farmers' Markets Ontario and the Ontario Farm Fresh Marketing Association and it's going to provide information to help farmers on how they can access farmers' markets with their produce, conduct consumer research, consumer awareness in marketing activities, expand the number of farmers selling directly to the public—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Bob Delaney: In the western GTA, shoppers choose farmers' markets for nature's best produce whenever they can, and they know full well that the food is fresh and it's high in quality. By helping farmers' markets and other venues that directly connect farmers and consumers, we all win, with a greater availability of local food, more focused promotions and more sales.

More and more residents are asking me about farmers' markets and what can be done to expand them, to support them. We are seeing farmers' markets become a principal destination for people in the western GTA to go to and purchase food because they provide an opportunity for shoppers to know exactly where their food comes from.

Minister, my question is: What kind of success are we seeing with this farmers' market strategy and what is the ministry's vision for the future of farmers' markets?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I was just speaking with my colleague from Sudbury, and he regularly goes to the farmers' markets in Sudbury. Again, this is a story that I hear from colleagues on all sides of the House. Everyone enjoys farmers' markets.

I want to say to the members of this assembly particularly that there's something very unique with respect to farmers' markets right here in Ontario. We have the only farmers' market in Canada located on a hospital site, and that's at Sick Kids Hospital right here in the city of Toronto, in downtown Toronto. I encourage all members of this Legislature and people of this city to go to Sick Kids Hospital to the farmers' market. The farmers there are from the greenbelt. They are there with their tents. This is what the greenbelt is all about. That is why we protected this land, so that we can have fresh farm products close to the people who need them, and that's right here in the city of Toronto.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for question period has ended. This House will stand recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1135 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I want to take this opportunity to welcome some guests of mine in the Speaker's gallery, and there are others who are going to

be touring around the building today. We have representatives from two organizations in my riding: St. Thomas Elgin Public Arts Centre and Middlemarch Women's Institute. Welcome to my guests at Queen's Park today.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SMALL BUSINESS WEEK

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Small Business Week is the perfect occasion to honour the females who are among Ontario's best employers, managers and workers.

Each year, I commemorate Small Business Week by celebrating the successful, hard-working and decent women in business who live, work and play in Nepean-Carleton. Over 100 women participate in the semi-annual Women in Business Breakfast, which I host but which is actually organized by women for women. They are contributing to Nepean-Carleton through their small, medium and home-based businesses. These women are the economic engine of Ottawa's southwest. Let me tell you: The old saying, "I am woman, hear me roar" is the best way to describe this economic engine.

The women who organize this event are Web developers like Avril Tsang, realtors like Betty Hillier, grocers like Kelly Ross, engineers like Nancy Davis, chiropractors like Salima Ismail and Vicky Clark, executive directors like Andrea Steenbakkers, or media executives like Diane Banks. I've also been grateful for the work of staff Wendy Noble, Helen Byers and Beth Graham.

On Friday, October 24, once again women in business in Nepean-Carleton are going to celebrate their collective contributions to small business in our community over breakfast with 100 of their colleagues, customers and friends. During Small Business Week, I encourage all members of this Ontario Legislature to thank a business owner and, as importantly, thank a businesswoman.

APOTEX INC.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I rise in the House today to pay tribute to a great Ontario-based company and to recognize a great humanitarian effort that I was fortunate enough to be part of recently.

On September 24, I accompanied an Ontario-based company called Apotex Inc., the largest Canadian-owned pharmaceutical company, to Rwanda to deliver the first shipment of AIDS drugs to that country. Apotex delivered seven million tablets of Apo-TriAvis. That's going to help save the lives of 21,000 people in that country.

The amazing thing is that Apotex did this on a humanitarian, not-for-profit basis. The trip was approved under our country's access-to-medicines regime, which allows Canadian generic drug manufacturers to legally produce patented drugs for export to developing countries with populations that are desperately in need. This is the first time any manufacturer in any country in the

world has used such a licensing framework to get essential medicine to people in the developing world. No other Canadian company has tried to provide the medications, because the system is far too time-consuming and far too complex.

It is time that our federal government looked into and fixed this complex process and cleared the red tape so more successful missions may be able to take place.

I was extremely honoured to be a part of this, and I wish to congratulate Apotex, a great Ontario company, COO Jack Kay and vice-president Bruce Clark for the tremendous help they gave in providing help to thousands of people who need it desperately.

ONTARIO PUBLIC LIBRARY WEEK

Mrs. Julia Munro: October 19 to 25 is Ontario Public Library Week. I'm very pleased to give my thanks and congratulations to the librarians, staff and volunteers of Ontario's public libraries.

When I spoke on library week two years ago, I told this House what the Georgina Public Library told me: "Rapidly evolving technologies are changing the way people access information and communicate with each other. Libraries are challenged to maintain traditional services and embrace new services, formats and technologies with existing money."

Libraries across Ontario, like the ones in my riding, are meeting these challenges. Bradford West Gwillimbury was one of the first public libraries in our area to establish an e-resource system. Georgina Public Library is launching a new live chat reference service. This allows library users to ask questions live to their library by e-mail. East Gwillimbury Public Library offers wireless Internet, e-mail requests and the Books for Babies program. In Innisfil, I was very proud to help break the ground for the new branch in Cookstown. This new library will be a centre for the whole community. King Township library runs innovative programs like the father-son book club.

My libraries are just a representative sample of the excellent work done by libraries in communities large and small across Ontario.

JANA MILLER

Mr. Jim Brownell: Too often in today's society, we sacrifice healthy eating for more convenient meal choices. We tend to choose the simplest meals as opposed to ones that give us the most nutrition. Sometimes we need that little bit of help in making wise food choices for ourselves and our families. That is why it pleases me greatly to see the efforts of a young entrepreneur in my riding of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry who has taken it upon herself to ensure that the citizens of the riding get the healthy meals that they need.

Jana Miller, a former student of mine, started a business called Fresh Lunch Ideas as part of the Ontario

Ministry of Small Business and Entrepreneurship Summer Company program. After receiving her \$1,500 start-up grant for young business owners, she dedicated herself to making and delivering healthy meal options to individuals and groups all over the region. She based her idea on the fact that she could make and distribute her healthy meals, being made with locally grown ingredients and packaged in environmentally friendly and compostable materials. After serving salads and other light summer fare, she has decided to continue to pursue her healthy eating vision through to the fall and winter months, providing healthy, comfortable winter selections to her dedicated customers. She continues to run her business while attending the University of Ottawa.

I am indeed proud to see this young woman maintain her entrepreneurial spirit while remaining responsible to the environment and to the health of the consumer. She embodies the type of outside-the-box vision and passion that are necessary to stay competitive and sustainable in today's economy. Congratulations, Jana. I wish you the best of success.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Mr. Norm Miller: This is Small Business Week in Canada, a week to recognize the very valuable contribution made by small business to our economy. But in Ontario, the McGuinty government has taken aim yet again at small business with a punishing new rule to make workers' compensation coverage mandatory for small contractors.

New rules are not new to this government. Regulations continue to multiply and bring ridiculous costs that bury small businesses in paperwork to keep bureaucrats in jobs. In fact, Mr. McGuinty has created twice as many government jobs as the private sector has lost. These government jobs are on the backs of businesses that are subject to heavy-handed fines and penalties for non-compliance with government regulations. Yet, with all these new government inspectors, businesses still can't speak to anyone in government who can explain the rules and help them to comply. This government's approach to small business is to fine, penalize and punish.

Every week I hear from businesses complaining about the heavy hand of the McGuinty government. This is backed up by a recent survey conducted by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business: Two out of three businesses surveyed say that the overall burden of provincial regulations has increased in the past three years. Is it any wonder, then, that a recent Toronto-Dominion survey shows that small business owners are losing sleep worrying about cash flows? Sadly, it's a trend that won't change anytime soon in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario.

LABOUR UNIONS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Last week, all members in this House would have received this booklet entitled *We Will Make a Difference: the Wal-Mart Canada Corporate*

Social Responsibility Report. Dead centre in this expensive booklet is a page where Wal-Mart claims to support and respect workers' rights to join a union. That's a very contradictory statement, considering Wal-Mart's recent actions to close down stores rather than deal with its newly unionized workers. It's impossible to believe when Wal-Mart has no organized workplaces in Ontario and was engaged in nasty union-busting activities in Windsor in the late 1990s. The United Food and Commercial Workers Union, under the leadership of Wayne Hanley, has been waging a valiant and concerted fight across Canada to bring Wal-Mart workers under the union umbrella of fair wages, good benefits and improved working conditions. Without a union, workers must settle for low wages and no security.

The UFCW is taking Wal-Mart to the Supreme Court over the company's shutdown last week of its oil and lube centre in Gatineau, Quebec. This follows Wal-Mart's closure of a store in Jonquière two years ago after workers there unionized. Wal-Mart doesn't care about bettering the lot of its workers; Wal-Mart shareholders make a fortune on low-waged workers. I hope that retail shoppers will shop at places that truly respect and support their workers. Wal-Mart isn't one of them, despite its claims of "making a difference." It's the wrong kind of difference.

1310

As New Democrats, we support UFCW and all our labour organizations that fight to improve wages and working conditions for our workers here in Ontario. We stand up for workers and their right to good jobs, good union representation, good pensions and good benefits.

COLORECTAL CANCER

Mr. Mike Colle: I think more than a few of us here would be surprised to discover that colorectal cancer is the second-leading cause of cancer deaths in Ontario. Even more surprising is that just one in five Ontarians aged 50 and over is screened for this terrible disease. However, with regular screenings, there is a 90% chance of colorectal cancer being cured.

It is with this information in mind that the McGuinty government has launched ColonCancerCheck, a new public awareness campaign that will educate Ontarians about the importance of early screening and detection of colorectal cancer.

The campaign includes a television advertising campaign and a website, www.ColonCancerCheck.ca. And starting in April, Ontarians who are 50 and over will be able to get a take-home colorectal cancer screening kit called a fecal occult blood test, or FOBT for short, from their health care provider. People who have an increased risk of colorectal cancer because of their family history and have a positive home screening test will receive a colonoscopy.

Based on the facts that we know about colorectal cancer, I can't emphasize enough the importance of

Ontarians using the FOBT take-home tests, with regular screening, to make a difference between life and death.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I rise today to inform this House of exciting new developments in the McGuinty government's ongoing commitment to attracting top researchers and strengthening the province's competitiveness in the global innovation-driven economy.

The Minister of Research and Innovation recently announced \$7.6 million for basic research through the Ontario Research Fund. This funding will support 13 institutions, 46 projects and 342 scientists in developing innovative products that will define the 21st-century economy while pushing the boundaries of science in fields such as space robotics, quantum physics and nanotechnology.

Some of the promising projects receiving funding through this initiative include:

- developing the next generation of planetary explorers and satellites, led by Dr. Alex Ellery of Carleton University;

- applying photonics, the science of light, to create new devices with applications ranging from wireless communications to energy conservation to medicine, led by Dr. Karin Hinzer from the University of Ottawa; and

- assisting the efforts of Ontario's top particle physicists to create world-leading sensor and detector technologies, led by Dr. David Asner, Dr. Kevin Graham and Dr. Mark Boulay.

These innovative and exciting projects are a symbol of the McGuinty government's commitment to ensure the competitiveness of Ontario industries now and in the future.

CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I rise in the House today to mark Child Abuse Prevention Month. During the month of October, there is an important public awareness campaign taking place about the devastating effects of child abuse on our children, the importance of early intervention and, of course, our duty to report suspected cases of child abuse.

On October 1, I had the pleasure of helping to launch the beginning of Child Abuse Prevention Month by using my voice in partnership with the Children's Aid Society of Toronto; members of the media; the mayor of Toronto, David Miller; and citizens from across the city. This event was about standing up against child abuse and using our voices to inform, educate and take collective action. The challenge was simple: Use Your Voice to speak out against child abuse. Participants' voices were measured in decibels to determine who had the loudest voice. There was a great effort on behalf of everyone to get the message out, loud and clear, the message that we cannot afford to be bystanders when it comes to the safety of our children and that we all have a shared

responsibility when it comes to the protection of our children.

This month, I'm asking my constituents in Etobicoke—Lakeshore to join with groups in our community, such as the Gatehouse and others, who have worked to raise their voices against child abuse. All Ontarians should do their part to raise their voices in support of child abuse prevention and to protect Ontario's children.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

PERSONS DAY

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm pleased to stand in the House today to commemorate Persons Day. Thanks to the relentless determination and courage of the Famous Five—Emily Murphy, Louise McKinney, Irene Parlby, Nellie McClung and Henrietta Muir Edwards—on October 18, 1929, Canadian women were formally recognized as persons and granted the right to be appointed to the Senate.

The history of this case is significant. Although women had the right to vote in most Canadian provinces in 1929, women were not legally recognized as “persons” under the British North America Act. This meant that women were not allowed to be appointed to the Senate of Canada, as senators had to be qualified persons under the law, a term that did not include women.

This was unacceptable to the Famous Five. They fought, challenging the definition of the term “person” all the way to the judicial committee of the Privy Council in Britain. It was this body on October 18, 1929, that broke from tradition and unanimously ruled that the word “persons” in the BNA Act does, indeed, include both men and women. The outcome of this historic case allowed women to be appointed to the Canadian Senate and paved the way for women in political life and beyond. As a society, we owe so much to the Famous Five.

But in addition to celebrating Persons Day, we owe it to them, as well as to our children, both daughters and sons, to continue the struggle and fight for gender equality. It was Emily Murphy who said, “We want women leaders today as never before. Leaders who are not afraid to be called names and who are willing to go out and fight....” Her words ring as true in 2008 as they did when she spoke them in 1931.

As Ontario's minister responsible for women's issues, I believe that the best way to honour the legacy of the Famous Five is to continue their impassioned pursuit for positive change. The determination of the Famous Five improved the lives of women by allowing them property rights, income assistance for widows and immigrants, and vocational training for impoverished working women.

But today, there are still obstacles to women's equality. Women's participation at all political levels is still

unacceptably low. We know that more women live in poverty in Ontario than do men, and some women are not safe in their own homes.

Our government is taking steps to make real progress in these areas—to foster leadership of women in their communities, to create women's economic independence and to prevent violence against women. We're making significant investments in these areas of need and the results are real. They're measured in human terms.

But, of course, there is still much more to do. Our government is committed to continuing to make progress for women in Ontario. As we celebrate Women's History Month, it's an occasion for all Ontarians to mark the extraordinary contributions that women have made in this province.

The enduring spirit of the Famous Five lives on. We'll continue in their honour and that of our daughters to work together to create lasting change.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

PERSONS DAY

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to be able to speak on behalf of the PC caucus today to recognize Persons Day. Persons Day is a time for all of us at Queen's Park and across the province to celebrate the contributions women have made and are making in Ontario, in Canada and around the world.

It took eight years for the Famous Five—Emily Murphy, Nellie McClung, Louise McKinney, Irene Parlby and Henrietta Muir Edwards—to succeed in their quest to have women declared persons under the constitution. With their hard work, they achieved their goal, and we thank the minister for providing us with the details of that long, arduous quest.

But we sometimes forget how significantly our lives were changed on October 18, 1929. It is important that we have times like these—times like Women's History Month, times like Persons Day—that encourage us to be grateful, to be humbled and to be inspired.

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Today, women hold senior posts in every area of our lives. Whether we're looking at banking, medicine, science, entrepreneurial leadership—just in every possible area, we can find women holding senior posts. In fact, today in our universities, over 50% of the graduates are women, and it's worth noting that women graduates earn more. But I remember, and I want to say that this has not been a quick process; in fact, we can characterize it as a slow process. From the 1930s, the 1940s, the 1950s, I can recall my mother and others of her generation talking about how they were unable to maintain their jobs if they were engaged to be married or, in fact, were married. It didn't matter whether you were a secretary or a teacher; that was the end of your career. So I think that we have to put this in that kind of a perspective. I remember when female flight attendants were called stewardesses; they were registered nurses; they had a mandatory retirement age. These are things, then,

that we should see in this scope of the changes that were all begun by the Famous Five.

I also remember—and I make the point of this not being in my mother's generation but in my generation—when I was at university and I went to the placement office, I was absolutely shocked at the number of pamphlets and information binders and things like that that were available for anyone, except right across the front it said, "For men only." That's incredible to think, that a relatively short time ago—and I appreciate that "relative" is always according to how old you are—it was okay to have a mandatory retirement age for a woman; it was okay to have jobs that were for men only. So I think that the challenge, obviously, that remains for us, in this society, is not only to increase the number of women in this House and in various professions, but to ensure that each woman can make the choices she wants in life.

I think it's important to note that I am especially proud to be sitting alongside a number of outstanding women who have entered public life. I would draw attention to those in my own caucus: Lisa MacLeod, Elizabeth Witmer, Laurie Scott, Christine Elliott, Joyce Savoline and Sylvia Jones, but we have women representing all parties in this House and taking on those leadership roles. Each of us, then, serves not only her province but also as a role model to all women.

So, in closing, I would say we've all benefited from the actions of the Famous Five in the persons case. Most importantly, all Canadian women have benefited, and we owe a debt of gratitude to those who have come before us and to the sacrifices they have made.

PERSONS DAY

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It is a pleasure and somewhat a sadness to rise to acknowledge Persons Day and to acknowledge the debt of gratitude we have to our foremothers, to the Famous Five. I usually start, when I speak to women, by saying I'm the first woman in my family who was born a person. Many of the women in this chamber were born to women who were considered property: property of their husbands, property of their fathers and certainly, the younger women were born to grandmothers who were property, property of their husbands, property of their fathers. So we have come a long way; there's no question about that. But certainly, it's a battle that has not yet been won.

We still fight for women's equality. You know, they call this place the Pink Palace. But it ain't pink enough. First and foremost, there are 27% women who sit in this chamber, and that is outrageous. There are about 21% of women who sit in the House of Commons; that is a worse record than Afghanistan, than Pakistan, than Rwanda. We are 51st in nations in terms of the number of women we elect to public office, and you know, there's a reason behind that. There is a reason that more women do not put themselves forward for public office and more women are not elected to public office. First and foremost among those reasons is the lack of child care in this

country and the lack of child care in this province, and it's not getting any better, certainly not in this province. When we look across the border to Quebec and see child care for \$7 a day, and look at our own sorry record, where only one in 10 children has a space for child care, we know why women don't run for office. We should have child care right here at Queen's Park. That would be a symbol to women across the province that women are actually welcomed into public office.

For our girl children who come through the so-called Pink Palace and go onto the public floors of this building, on the main floor and the second floor they see only two women portrayed. One of them is Agnes MacPhail—I make sure to rub her shoulder every time I walk past her—and the other is the Queen. Those are the only two women on the walls of the first two public floors. These girls walk past that, and what message does that send to them? It sends them the message that this is a place for men and men only, not for them. We should be ashamed of that record.

I know that we, as New Democrats, put forward a resolution. We asked the governing party to make sure that the next Speaker of the House was a woman. We have never had a Speaker of the House in Ontario who was a woman. No offence to the present Speaker, who is doing a wonderful job, but surely out of all the able women across the floor we could find one to be elected as Speaker next time around.

So in honour of the famous five, I'm putting forward five famous demands:

(1) We need to restore funding to the commission and tribunal for equity. It's the 20th anniversary of women's pay equity, and women still earn 71 cents to every dollar a man earns.

(2) We need to raise the minimum wage, because the minimum wage is a women's issue. Poverty is a women's issue. That minimum wage should now be \$10.25, and indexed to inflation.

(3) As I've said already, we need daycare for all women who want to and are able to work.

(4) On behalf of the Miss G_ Project, this incredible group of young women who want women's studies in high schools, we need mandatory women's studies in high school.

Finally, please, across the aisle, make sure that the next time that chair becomes available, there is a woman sitting in it, so that for the first time our schoolgirls can walk into this place and see a woman's portrait on the wall, not just men's.

PETITIONS

TUITION

M^{me} France Gélinas: I am really pleased to present a petition that was presented to me on Friday, which was the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. It

was presented to me by Richard Paquette, president of student association Local 30 at Laurentian University.

"We petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas undergraduate tuition fees in Ontario have increased by 195% since 1990 and are the third-highest in all of the provinces in Canada; and

"Whereas average student debt in Ontario has skyrocketed by 250% in the last 15 years to over \$25,000 for four years of study; and

"Whereas international students pay three to four times more for the same education, and domestic students in professional programs such as law or medicine pay as much tuition as \$20,000 per year; and

"Whereas 70% of new jobs require post-secondary education, and fees reduce the opportunity for many low- and middle-income families while magnifying barriers for aboriginal, rural, racialized and other marginalized students; and

"Whereas Ontario currently provides the lowest per capita funding for post-secondary education in Canada, while many countries fully fund higher education and charge little or no fees for college and university; and
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"Whereas public opinion polls show that nearly three quarters of Ontarians think the government's Reaching Higher framework for tuition fee increases of 20% to 36% over four years is unfair; ..."

Therefore, they petition the Legislative Assembly to introduce a framework that:

"(1) Reduces tuition and ancillary fees annually for students.

"(2) Converts a portion of every student loan into a grant.

"(3) Increases per student funding above the national average."

I fully support this petition. I will affix my name to it and send it with page Andrew.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: This petition is about fairness for Ontario workers.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the federal government's employment insurance surplus now stands at \$54 billion; and

"Whereas over 60% of Ontario's unemployed are not eligible for employment insurance because of Ottawa's unfair eligibility rules; and

"Whereas an Ontario worker has to work more weeks to qualify and receives fewer weeks of benefits than other Canadian unemployed workers; and

"Whereas the average Ontario unemployed worker gets \$4,000 less in EI benefits than unemployed workers in other provinces and thus not qualifying for many retraining programs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to press the federal government to reform the employment insurance program and to end the

discrimination and unfairness towards Ontario's unemployed workers."

Mr. Speaker, I agree and I am delighted to send this to you.

LOGGING ROUTE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with logging through the village of Restoule, and it reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Nipissing forest management plan proposes to use Hawthorne Drive in Restoule, which features a single-lane bridge and narrow and steep sections; and

"Whereas area residents have grave concerns about community safety, traffic speed, truck noise and general wear and tear of Hawthorne Drive and the bridge in the village of Restoule; and

"Whereas the proposed route travels past the Restoule Canadian Legion and two churches; and

"Whereas alternative routes are possible via Odorizzi Road and Block 09-056;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario put the safety and concerns of the people of Restoule ahead of logging interests and ensure an alternate route is selected for the Nipissing forest management plan."

I support this petition.

CHILD PROTECTION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario regarding Ombudsman oversight of children's aid societies.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Whereas Ontario is one of the few provinces that does not have independent oversight of child welfare administration; and

"Whereas eight provinces now have independent oversight of child welfare issues, including child protection; and

"Whereas all provincial Ombudsmen first identified child protection as a priority issue in 1986 and still Ontario does not allow the Ombudsman to investigate people's complaints about children's aid societies' decisions; and

"Whereas people wronged by CAS decisions concerning placement, access, custody or care are not allowed to appeal those decisions to the Ontario Ombudsman's office;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we support the Ombudsman having the power to probe decisions and investigate complaints concerning the province's children's aid societies (CAS)."

I support this. I will sign it and send it to the table via page Laura.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Kim Craitor: I am pleased to introduce this petition on behalf of grandparents across Ontario. The petition reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents, as requested in Bill 33, put forward by" the member from Niagara Falls.

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

I'm pleased to sign this in support and give this to the page to bring forward to the table.

INNISFIL EARLY YEARS CENTRE

Mrs. Julia Munro: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"The Innisfil, Ontario, early years centre offers an essential service to the Innisfil and south Barrie preschoolers, their parents and caregivers;

"It is a vital resource centre that meets the needs of this growing community;

"Additionally, we fear that the Barrie early years centre will be unable to accommodate the increased traffic due to the addition of the Innisfil families to their centre;

"Therefore, we urge you to consider your decision to close our greatly used and much-needed Innisfil satellite."

As I am in agreement, I have included my signature.

ONTARIO SOCIETY
FOR THE PREVENTION
OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition in support of Bill 50, the Provincial Animal Welfare Act.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act has not been updated since 1919;

"Whereas Bill 50 would require all veterinarians to report suspected abuse and neglect, protecting veterinarians from liability;

"Whereas it would allow the OSPCA to inspect and investigate places where animals are kept;

"Whereas the bill would prohibit the training of animals to fight;

"Whereas Bill 50 would allow the OSPCA to inspect roadside zoos;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 50, entitled the Provincial Animal Welfare Act, 2008, to protect our animal friends."

This is brought to me by the good people at the Global Pet Foods store in my riding, and I support—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for Parry Sound–Muskoka.

EMERGENCY DISPATCH SERVICES

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with 911 communication services in Muskoka.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is considering relocating emergency ambulance and fire dispatch services currently provided by Muskoka Ambulance Communications Service to the city of Barrie; and

"Whereas up to 40% of all calls received are from cellphones from people unfamiliar with the area; and

"Whereas Parry Sound–Muskoka residents have grave concerns about the effect on emergency response times if dispatch services are provided by dispatchers who are not familiar with the area; and

"Whereas 16 Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care-funded jobs, held by qualified communication officers from local communities, may be lost as a result of the relocation of dispatch services to the city of Barrie,

"Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario put the safety, health and economic concerns of the people of Parry Sound–Muskoka ahead of government efficiency interests and ensure that emergency dispatch services continue to be provided locally by Muskoka Ambulance Communications Service."

I support this petition.

HOSPICES

Mr. Mike Colle: I have some petitions from the good people of the Hospice Association of Ontario.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas hospices on church or hospital property do not pay taxes;

"Whereas hospices are not-for-profit organizations providing emotional, spiritual and bereavement support

and respite care to terminally ill individuals and their family members;

"Whereas a residential hospice (usually an eight to 10 bed home-like facility) provides around-the-clock care to terminally ill individuals and support to their families;

"Whereas hospice services are provided free of charge;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to allow hospices across the province to be exempt from municipal taxes."

I support this petition and I affix my name to it.

LABORATORY SERVICES

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with maintaining community lab services in Parry Sound-Muskoka.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the residents of the communities served by Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare (MAHC) wish to maintain current community lab services; and

"Whereas maintaining community lab services promotes physician retention and benefits family health teams; and

"Whereas the funding for community lab services is currently a strain on the operating budget of MAHC; and
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"Whereas demand for health services is expected to continue to rise with a growing retirement population in Muskoka-East Parry Sound; and

"Whereas the operating budget for MAHC needs to reflect the growing demand for service in the communities of Muskoka-East Parry Sound;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty government and the Minister of Health increase the operating budget of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare to permit continued operation of community lab services."

I support this petition.

IDENTITY THEFT

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: This petition is about identity theft.

"To the Parliament of Ontario and the Minister of Government Services:

"Whereas identity theft is the fastest-growing crime in North America;

"Whereas confidential and private information is being stolen on a regular basis, affecting literally thousands of people;

"Whereas the cost of this crime exceeds billions of dollars;

"Whereas countless hours are wasted to restore one's good credit rating;

"We, the undersigned, demand that Bill 38, which passed the second reading unanimously in the Ontario Legislature ... be brought before committee and that the

following issues be included for consideration and debate:

"(1) All consumer reports should be provided in a truncated (masked-out) form, protecting our vital private information such as SIN and credit card numbers.

"(2) Should a credit bureau discover that there has been a breach of consumer information, the agency should immediately inform the victimized consumer.

"(3) Credit bureaus should only report inquiries resulting out of actual applications for credit and for no other reasons.

"(4) Credit bureaus should investigate any complaints within 30 days and correct or automatically delete any information found unconfirmed or inaccurate."

I agree with this petition 100% and I am delighted to sign it.

ONTARIO SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Mr. Mike Colle: I have some more petitions with regard to the Provincial Animal Welfare Act.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act has not been updated since 1919;

"Whereas Bill 50 would require all veterinarians to report suspected abuse and neglect, protecting veterinarians from liability;

"Whereas it would allow the OSPCA to inspect and investigate places where animals are kept;

"Whereas the bill would prohibit the training of animals to fight;

"Whereas Bill 50 would allow the OSPCA to inspect roadside zoos;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 50, entitled the Provincial Animal Welfare Act, 2008, to protect our animal friends."

I support this petition, along with hundreds of other people, and I affix my name to it.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Davenport.

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL POLICIES

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing me again; I appreciate that.

This petition is for fairness for Ontario workers. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the federal government gives more support for economic development, health care and infrastructure to other parts of Canada, and unemployed workers in Ontario get less employment insurance support than in other parts of Canada; and

"Whereas the federal system of taxes and equalization extracts over \$20 billion from the people of Ontario

every year above and beyond what Ottawa invests in Ontario; and

“Whereas laid-off workers in Ontario get \$4,630 less in employment insurance than they would get if they lived in another part of Canada; and

“Whereas federal health care money is supposed to be divided equally among all Canadians, but right now Ontario residents are shortchanged by \$773 million per year; and

“Whereas the federal government provides economic development support for people living in the north, Atlantic Canada, Quebec and the west, but provides no economic development support for southern Ontario;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to demand that the federal government stop gouging the people of Ontario and treat them fairly.”

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 16, 2008, on the amendment to the amendment to the motion by Mr. McGuinty to acknowledge the economic challenges facing the province and continuing to implement an economic plan.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I'm delighted to add my comments to Mr. McGuinty's motion that we are facing economic challenges.

Most Ontarians know by now that we are in the midst of an economic crisis, and if we are not careful to husband our resources fairly carefully, this whole economic mess might spiral out of control. Now, some economic variables we are able to control, and some, of course, we cannot control.

Let's look at those we cannot control for a minute. How do we compete with China, how do we compete with India, and even, for that matter, how do we compete with Mexico? The McGuinty government has done more than an incredible job to ensure that we are able to at least somewhat compete with those other jurisdictions, even though it may be difficult. How do we compete with a country that pays its workers 10 times less than our workers make in Ontario? How do we compete? How can we possibly control that variable in this economic mess? It's very hard to do.

The reason I've said that the McGuinty government has done an incredible job is because we saw the storm clouds on the horizon, and I give our Premier full credit in trying to ensure that some of the steps were taken to ensure that those storm clouds did not get out of control and that we are able to compete with other jurisdictions even when that is very, very difficult, and I've mentioned those countries previously.

What has the government done in the meantime to ensure that there is some competitiveness going on? One,

look at the Ontario budgets—the first budget, introduced in 2003, the second budget in 2004.

The Plan for Change, the 2004 budget, brought the province back to fiscal health. It eliminated the deficit and balanced the budget for the first mandate. It focused on increased investments and vital public services like health care, education, the environment, public safety, and it brought a new law to guarantee that no government could ever again hide a deficit. It made sure that the Auditor General signed off on the books before the election.

The 2005 budget, \$6.2 billion, the Reaching Higher plan for post-secondary education: to ensure that our children—our kids in schools—are able to compete with those from other jurisdictions. It's the largest multi-year investment in the system for 40 years. It has resulted in 100,000 more students in post-secondary education today in order for them again to compete and to have a future in this new economic structure that the world is moving to. It provided grants to 120,000 students and invested in skills and know-how today as an investment in jobs for tomorrow. It launched ReNew Ontario, a five-year, \$30-billion infrastructure investment plan.

The 2006 budget, Building Opportunity: Investing in roads and bridges and public transit infrastructure, it creates jobs in the short term and adds productivity in the long term. It created a new jobs and skills renewal strategy to expand training and employment services. There's the 2007 budget, Investing in People and Expanding Opportunity, and on and on it goes.

The McGuinty government, as I said earlier, has done more than an incredible job in trying to ensure that we have some basis with which our kids—and we, for that matter, today—are able to compete in a future world, which does not look so great for those people who are adding value to the resources. That may be one of our first problems, and that is, when we look at the history of our own country, how did the banks, in the first place, get established here? How did the banks make profit? Well, this is a vast country. Canada is a big country, Canada is, and when you think about the resources that we have at our disposal that the rest of the world does not, with 32 million people, you ask yourself, “Well, in what way can we get the banks to help us out now?” Because, historically speaking, this country has always been known as hewers of wood and the drawers of water, meaning that never in the past were we able to add value to the resources we took out of the ground, or the wheat we harvested, or the mines or forests. Imagine this: We shipped tonnes and tonnes of trees out to the United States and we imported back Kodak paper. We added nothing to the value of our resources that left this country.

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We all know that the international corporations have no loyalty. If they had loyalty, they would be here with us. Company after company: Where did they go to? They went to the places where the workers got very little. In fact, while we're talking today, they're still leaving. For that matter, I want to tell you something interesting. One

of my theses, when I was at university, was entitled "The Star-Spangled Beaver." Why "Star-Spangled Beaver"? In the 1970s, we had already discovered a man called Mel Watkins. Mel Watkins, along with many, many other economists, came to one conclusion, and the conclusion was very simple: that American multinational corporations already owned, in the early 1970s, over 75% of our resource sectors. Imagine that. Now we've got NAFTA. What does NAFTA tell us? When our dollar is low, we invite more people to come up and not only buy our resources but buy our very companies that might add a little bit of these resources and add some value to the resources that are produced. Wow, a lot now.

There was a question from the audience across from here: "What are the Liberals doing about it?" Well, thanks to Mr. McGuinty, because we trusted his leadership; thanks to Mr. McGuinty, because, in every budget up to now, he has had the foresight to see the economic clouds on the horizon and to make us competitive—that's what he did and that's why we on this side are delighted for our Premier. This Premier ensured that the government was following, step by step, in the direction and with those variables that we are able to control.

You all know that there are some variables which we cannot control. I mentioned them before: How do you compete with China? How do you make our kids competitive? Think about that.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Do you have an answer?

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Of course, we have an answer. We have some recommendations that I would want to make personally.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The five-point plan.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Yes, the five-point plan, which I'm delighted to see that the opposition agrees with. He agrees with the five-point plan; that's wonderful. The Conservatives may come up with a six-point plan. Five points are good; maybe the sixth point is better. Let's see what the sixth point is. It might be.

Look, we're here. On this situation, the Premier said earlier to every one of us that we are non-partisan. We are non-partisan when it comes to this economic crisis, which all of us are into. We've got to come together, and that's what this is all about.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Reach out.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: We are reaching out, we're certainly reaching out, and you, sir, are part of the solution and the Conservative Party is part of the solution. In fact, we all have to ensure that we are going to be competitive in the future. I'll be very, very sad if indeed we don't come to a unanimous conclusion here in this House, and I'll be sadder for our children in the future because they're the ones we have to train in terms of skills to be able to compete. If we don't want other countries to eat us for lunch—you know what that phrase "eating us for lunch" means. It means we're not competitive in this country. We have to be committed. In the future we cannot simply be known as drawers of water and hewers of wood. If we don't add value to our products, we're going to be in sad shape. That's my first

recommendation. We've got to make sure that the government looks at that, and the Premier, with his foresight, has already said that to us. If he hasn't said it to you, he certainly said over and over again in caucus that we've got to add value to the products we produce. I'm sure you agree with that as well.

My second recommendation is also a good one: With the credit market still on a life-support system, we want to ensure that the banks, at least to some degree, are helping them out, even though the government is supporting the banks in terms of giving loans not just to interbanking systems, meaning from one bank to another—and of course, we know that one bank is afraid to lend money to another for fear it might go bankrupt.

I've just been given a note that I've got to stop quickly, so that means—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Who told you to stop?

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I would like to go on. I have more than two hours, but I've got to adjust myself to the clock.

Consequently, we want to make sure that the government, at least to some degree, guarantees loans, not only interbank loans but loans to small business. It's small business that produces most of the jobs in this country, and that has to be done.

Finally—and I don't have much time—my third recommendation would simply be to ensure labour mobility—the Premier and other Premiers are addressing that point as we speak. I thank you very much for listening to my presentation.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Applause.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thanks to my fans here.

It's a pleasure for me to rise today to speak to the government motion regarding the economic challenges facing Ontario. It's important that we have this debate, but I'm very disappointed in the motion we are debating here today. Now is the time for us all to work together on creating a stronger Ontario economy, and what we get from the government is a partisan motion that attempts to absolve them from any action they may or may not take in the future and to rubber-stamp their actions in the past. Instead of trying to work together in this Legislature with the opposition and the third party on a motion we could all support on an issue that is important to all of our constituents, the government simply asks us to rubber-stamp all the actions they have taken since 2003 and tell them what a great job they're doing. Well, we on this side of the House just can't do that.

I believe the government's actions have contributed to many of the economic problems we face. The policies of the McGuinty government have done nothing to make Ontario's economy stronger. This government has, in fact, engaged in 3-D economics: delaying, dithering and denial. Let's review their record.

When they took office, they immediately introduced the largest tax hike in Ontario's history. Government

spending has been completely out of control. Just to give you an idea, this government's spending is \$20 billion more today than when it took office. I know that's hard to comprehend, but that represents a 31% increase in government and program spending, according to Kevin Gaudet of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation—not my numbers but the Canadian Taxpayers Federation's. We never could sustain these levels of spending, and now, because of the economic turmoil we're going through, we are going to pay the price for it.

Our party has been calling for a substantive debate on the economy for a long time—in fact, for months. But this motion is nothing but a publicity stunt from the Premier and the government. For over a year this government has repeatedly said that everything is fine with the economy: “Don't worry, be happy.” During the last election, they in fact told Ontarians that they had nothing to worry about. We on this side of the House, in the opposition and the third party, knew differently. Even some of their own members probably knew differently, if they had felt free to say so.

Since the election, we have consistently called upon the Premier to deal with these issues that are impacting our manufacturing sector, and they have done nothing. We have said that you need to deal with the high energy costs our manufacturers in this province have to deal with. We have told the government to reduce the burden of taxes on business and on investment. We have also asked for the government to immediately eliminate the capital tax. My party had a plan to help our manufacturers months before this government woke up to the fact that they had a crisis in manufacturing.

I have the privilege of representing the riding of Sarnia-Lambton. Sarnia-Lambton is a great riding and in that riding is the city of Sarnia. This is a city that relies heavily on manufacturing. All you have to do is read the local paper, the Sarnia Observer, and you can see the storm clouds on the horizon, and that the economy and manufacturing, particularly in some areas, are in trouble. Since the election last October, for example, Lanxess in Sarnia announced that it was closing one of its units, throwing many of my constituents out of work. Recently, Shell announced that a plant it had looked at for months and spent millions of dollars going forward with is being put on hold; they are not going ahead and building a new refinery in St. Clair township.

To add to this problem, the government is still planning to go ahead with their wrong-headed idea to shut down the Lambton generating station, which will throw over 400 people in my riding out of work. This generates over \$40 million a year in economic activity and payroll, along with another \$200 million in related work downstream. Closing the Lambton generating station will cause more economic damage in Ontario than just throwing my constituents out of work. The Lambton generating station generates some of the cheapest power in Ontario. We should be working on making it a cleaner power rather than just shutting it down, especially with the state of the economy.

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One of the other problems already in our manufacturing sector is the high cost of power. Last week, the Ontario Energy Board approved a 10% increase in the cost of electricity. When you remove the ability to produce cheap electricity, these prices automatically will have to go up more.

I know in the case of Lanxess that when they announced their closure, they cited the fact that energy in Europe where they were moving production was at least 20% lower than here in Ontario, where they had their production facilities located. If we know that energy costs are one of the major factors in our manufacturing decline, why are we still talking about closing generating stations like Lambton?

In Lambton county, our farmers are also feeling the pinch of this economic crisis. The McGuinty government rushed out programs to help our cattle, hog and horticulture sectors, and instead of doing it the right way, they designed a program that sent money to many people who have been out of farming for years and didn't send it to the young farmers who really needed it.

On Thursday, the government has the opportunity to take some bold steps to help our agricultural sector. They need to take these steps to relieve the stifling red tape they have put on the agri-food sector. I hope they will start doing that, although I'm not very hopeful in that matter.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Meat inspectors. I know you have a thing about meat inspectors.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I hear comments from the other side supporting my arguments, and I appreciate that.

Of course, the way the Ministry of Agriculture is going—

Interjections.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you for your comments urging me forward.

Of course, the way the Ministry of Agriculture is going, it will soon only have two divisions left. One division will regulate the farmers and the other division will throw money at those farmers trying to keep them in business. So it will be kind of a cyclical operation.

Farmers understand what the score is. They know that Agricorp isn't exactly a model of efficiency. The government's own value-for-money audit seemed to point that out. While we on this side of the House want to see real changes at Agricorp, we aren't confident that we will see them from this government. This is the government that has stalled on taking action on their own audit of Agricorp.

So we are a year late in having this debate. We're a year late in coming to the table and trying to find alternatives and ideas for Ontario.

How is the government suggesting that they deal with this crisis in manufacturing and our economy? They say they have a five-point plan. If the truth be told, from what I see it's not much of a plan. As a matter of fact, it reminds me a lot of a five-pointed compass. The five-

pointed compass will take you north, south, east, west and nowhere.

What is disappointing in the government's position is that after a year of saying there's no problem, they want to talk to us about what they should do. Further delay is all we are getting from this government when what we need is action.

My party, the party of John Tory, has already taken the time to consult with leading economists, and it confirmed what we on this side of the House knew. Last month, our party and John Tory hosted a jobs and economy round table so that we could hear first-hand from the experts about how we can make Ontario more prosperous.

Interjections.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I hear members of the government cheering me on about the economic conference we had, and you're right: It was very well attended and very knowledgeable. A lot of information was garnered from that, and I'll be glad to share it with all the members of the government as well.

According to Roger Martin, whom this government says it consults with regularly, our tax structure in Ontario is one of the worst on the planet—not my words. These are Roger Martin's, the guy you guys consult with all the time. He says that it has effectively choked productivity to the point where our businesses under-invest in their workers, making them less productive. That means they earn less and pay less in taxes, which helps government run.

What has been the impact of our tax structure? Well, according to these same experts, the purchasing power of our workforce has gone from being \$500 ahead of the median of 14 jurisdictions in America that are half our size or bigger in 1981 to \$6,000 behind the median. This translates into \$27 billion less today to spend than we would have had if we had just maintained our position from 1981. Think of what we could do in this province with \$27 billion. I hesitate to say that because with this government's track record, they probably would have spent it.

Going forward, we could pass this biggest tax cut in Ontario's history. We could go a long way to wiping out the infrastructure deficit in our cities and rural municipalities through roads, bridges and sewers, along with a myriad of other projects.

What we have in fact managed to do is take away our fiscal capacity, in this province, to do the things that Ontarians want us to do: take care of the less fortunate, build infrastructure, and educate our young people so that they can compete for jobs and help them earn a living in the fast-changing world.

According to the same Mr. Martin, our businesses invest 26% fewer dollars in our workers in terms of machinery, equipment and computers. We need to make this province of Ontario a place where businesses are encouraged to invest in their workforce. This government has shown no willingness to deal with the structural problems in our tax system that would encourage businesses to invest.

One of the other things that the government needs to do, according to Mr. Martin, is take a good, hard look at our education system. We know that about 70% of the jobs that are going to be created in Ontario in the future will require some sort of post-secondary education. Currently, in Ontario, only 50% of our young people leaving high school get a post-secondary education. How can we expect our workers in this new world to compete in the knowledge-based economy when only half of them will have any sort of post-secondary education? I believe, on this side of the House, that we do have a fundamental problem with the size and capacity of our post-secondary education system, and it will be the young people of today who will pay the price for this in the future in the form of lower-paying jobs and poorer input to the economy through taxes and their input.

We also know that the economy could benefit from an increase in the number of apprentices for skilled trades.

Interjection.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I hear more support for my argument again here.

Again, instead of working to increase the number of apprentices that can go through the system, the government has encouraged and put in place restrictive apprenticeship ratios that guarantee we won't be able to produce the number of apprentices that we need, in this economy, to help grow the economy.

It is fitting that we are having this debate during Small Business Week. The McGuinty government has been actively working to put in place more red tape and bureaucracy to kill our small businesses, when in this week we should be honouring and doing everything we can to encourage small business in this province.

Just this month I raised the issue about a business in Guelph called Cash Rolls, which was forced to move its manufacturing division to the United States because the Ministry of Labour wouldn't give them the time, or work with them, to come into compliance with regulations. That forced them to move that part of their operation to the US.

Closer to home for me, in Sarnia-Lambton, Mr. Chris Cooke, who is the owner of Huron Web printing in Wyoming, had a businessman's worst nightmare come true. Huron Web employs approximately 95 people and has annual sales of over \$20 million. They print 14 million grocery inserts per week, making them the largest printer of grocery inserts in Ontario. In October 2005, Huron Web was shut down for nine hours, which doesn't sound like a lot, I'm sure, to many people in this august assembly, but nine hours when you're in a printing business for just-in-time delivery for grocery inserts is critical. A Ministry of Labour inspector looked at the equipment and thought the guards on the printing presses were not adequate. Mr. Cooke immediately undertook the work to get the presses back online so he could meet his deadlines. He made the necessary repairs. Then one of the presses was found to be out of compliance. He had bought this just three months before and it was brand new. The manufacturer of the press, which was built here

in Ontario, still believes the press was compliant with all the regulations.

After completing these repairs to said press, the Ministry of Labour inspector wasn't available to Mr. Cooke to come back and certify the work had been done so they could restart the printing process, adding more delays. In Chris's business, lost time means deadlines aren't met, he loses money and customers are disappointed. The Ministry of Labour was quick to shut down these presses but not so fast to let them get back up and running. Fortunately, Mr. Cooke was able to get someone after-hours and they were able to come back and start them up.

What was maybe worse was that, after the fact, Mr. Cooke found out that the interpretation of these safety rules was left up to the individual inspector. So competitors of Mr. Cooke's, with the same presses, were told they were in compliance and were allowed to keep printing. These regulations were not written down anywhere. Interpretation was left completely up to the local inspector, which led to this problem.

I also know in Sarnia-Lambton of a local restaurant owner who had a government inspector that—the famous words, “I am from the government and I am here to help you” didn't turn out in this case. This government inspector came to audit his PST rebates and spent five weeks there. At the end of the day, after this government auditor spending five weeks there auditing and going through his books, the small business owner, instead of being out cooking meals, which he should have been doing to help make a living, had to take time and also had to pay his own auditor to come in and work with him. They found a discrepancy of \$1,800. Untold thousands of dollars in payroll costs to the government auditor to conduct this, and it was just a waste of time. It seems like a lot of overkill to me.

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All of us in this chamber, on all sides of the House, I'm sure—government members, members of the opposition and the third party as well—have heard from our constituents about these things. Everyone, if they want to be honest, could say that. Small business and even larger businesses feel that the government is working against our businesses and not with them. This attitude needs to change if we are to seriously address the issues in our economy.

As a matter of fact, just last week, the government announced that they are adding more costs to small business through the WSIB system. We'll speak more about that later in the House today; it was addressed this morning. I'm surprised that the government is taking this action now, when we are having problems in the economy. The economy is in trouble, and now is not the time to add more bureaucracy and more costs to small business. Let's get through this crisis, sit down and take a look at these issues and help these small businesses. We're losing these larger employers. We have to do everything we can at this time to keep these small businesses active.

This motion does nothing, in my opinion, to show us that the government is interested in working with all members of the Legislature to help solve these economic problems. This government is far more interested in trying to score partisan political points.

Those are my remarks, and I look forward to the rest of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath):
Further debate?

Mr. Howard Hampton: I'm pleased to participate in this debate because I have a lot to say on some of these issues, which will not surprise you, Speaker.

I want to first deal with the government's main motion, because there are some things in this main motion that are no longer true. The McGuinty government would want Ontarians to believe that Ontario's jobs problems and economics problems are all created out there by someone else, so in the first couple of lines of the Premier's motion he says, “Well, it's the high dollar and it's the high international oil price.” Maybe this is a surprise to members of the McGuinty government, but the dollar has dropped a lot in value. The dollar has dropped an awful lot in value. It's now what—about 85 cents US? So the dollar has dropped a lot in value. Not only that, but the McGuinty government would have you believe that the price of oil is astronomical and that is killing off jobs in Ontario. Well, I have to tell you, the price of oil has dropped astronomically, such that today the OPEC countries are seriously thinking about cutting back on production. But according to the McGuinty government, the job losses in Ontario are all due to the high price of oil and the too-high value of the Canadian dollar.

I want people at home to reflect on this. Is this reality or is this the McGuinty government once again looking for someone to blame? I suggest the record strongly indicates that once again it's the McGuinty government looking for someone to blame. And the facts? They don't matter.

But there's something else here that jumps out at me. The McGuinty government would have us believe that somehow what they've been doing over the last five years has been good for the Ontario economy and good for jobs. Well, I don't know about McGuinty Liberals, but I know that Ontarians across this province, working people across this province, don't consider the loss of 230,000 manufacturing jobs and 40,000 direct and indirect forest sector jobs any kind of successful management of the economy. Working people across Ontario consider what has happened a disaster. People who have worked hard all their lives, people who have paid their taxes, contributed to the economy, contributed to the community and tried to raise their kids are suddenly now losing their jobs, losing their homes, losing their livelihoods. And what do they get from the McGuinty government in this motion? A lot more empty words, a lot more trying to blame it on somebody else.

It's worthwhile in this context comparing what's gone on here in Ontario with what's happening in other provinces. Whenever I travel through northern Ontario, I

have to listen to people raise this issue with me. The forest sector in northern Ontario has been decimated over the last four years, absolutely decimated. It's like when the train conductors used to list off all of the towns and cities that the train would stop in. You could start off with Cochrane, Iroquois Falls, Sturgeon Falls, Kapuskasing, Hearst, Chapleau, Nairn Centre, Espanola, Sault Ste. Marie, Dubreuilville, Wawa, White River, Hornepayne, Longlac, Geraldton, Nipigon, Red Rock, Thunder Bay, Atikokan, Dryden, Ignace, Kenora, and Sioux Lookout. It reads just like a long list of communities across northern Ontario.

It's not as if this was unexpected. It's not as if this fell out of the sky. I remember that in the summer of 2004, workers, managers and community leaders from forest sector communities came here to Queen's Park and they said to the ministers of the McGuinty government, "Look, we can see storm clouds on the horizon. What's been going on in the United States in terms of phony mortgages is going to get the American economy into trouble. We can see the housing market hitting trouble. We can see some other problems." They said to the McGuinty government, "Your energy policy indicates that you're prepared to treat energy for industry the same way that you would treat electricity for air conditioning. And if you do that, you will raise the industrial hydro rate so high that mill after mill, job after job, and community after community will be decimated." They were oh, so clear on this. They couldn't have spelled it out any better if they painted a picture. They said, "If the McGuinty government persists with driving the industrial rate of hydroelectricity through the roof, you will kill tens of thousands of jobs, you will shut down dozens of mills and you will decimate dozens of communities."

What was the response of the McGuinty government? The response of the McGuinty government to all of those people who came here in good faith was, "We don't have time for you. We don't have time for you and, frankly, we don't care about you." So what they predicted, what they desperately did not want to see happen but what they predicted would happen, has in fact happened.

The McGuinty government, again, would have you believe that it's the high value of the Canadian dollar and it's the high cost of oil that is the source of this. Well, I invite people from across Ontario to take a trip to Manitoba. Manitoba faces the same oil prices, faces the same value of the American dollar, and faces the same trade conditions. But you know what? In Manitoba, not one sawmill, not one paper mill, not one pulp mill and not one oriented strand board mill has been shut down. Not one community has been decimated, and thousands of forest sector jobs have been sustained. You don't have to go to China to see this, as it seems the Premier does every few weeks now. All you have to do is catch a flight to Winnipeg. Drive to Pine Falls; go to The Pas; go to Swan River. The even greater irony is that companies that operate two or three sawmills in Manitoba and one in Ontario—they shut down their Ontario operation and are continuing their Manitoba operation.

Obviously, it doesn't have anything to do with the high price of oil; they face the same oil prices we do in Ontario. It doesn't have anything to do with the up and down in the value of the American dollar; they face the same American dollar.

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What does it have to do with? Well, one thing it very clearly has to do with is the industrial rate of electricity. The McGuinty government believes that electricity for jobs in sectors like steel and pulp and paper should be valued the same as electricity for someone's plasma TV or for somebody who wants to air condition their home.

I remember, just a couple of years ago, one of the downtown Toronto environmentalists took a trip down Bay Street on one of the hottest days of summer and found stores like Harry Rosen and some of the others with the air conditioning cranked right up—they didn't care how much electricity they used—and the doors open, because electricity might account for only 2% of their overall costs. But the same sort of thing—those kinds of hydro rates—would absolutely wipe out a paper mill, a pulp mill or a sawmill. That is one of the real differences we're talking about here.

Manitoba said, "Look, we value electricity to sustain jobs more than we value electricity for someone's plasma TV." Plasma TVs guzzle electricity like there's no tomorrow. Their policy is that if you want to have three plasma TVs in your house, you pay for it; you pay a higher electricity rate. If you want to turn your air conditioning on, on the hottest days, and open the doors and windows and air condition the outside, you pay for it. But you don't put workers out of work through an electricity policy that is designed to destroy jobs, which is what it's doing here.

I remember when the Kenora paper mill, a two-machine newsprint mill in my constituency, closed three years ago. Their hydro bill under the McGuinty government was \$2.3 million a month. This was a mill that was surrounded by hydro dams that generate electricity, not at some of the lowest costs in Ontario, not at some of the lowest costs in North America, but at some of the lowest costs in the world. This was a mill surrounded by hydro dams on the Winnipeg River that generate electricity for less than one cent a kilowatt hour, but they were paying \$2.3 million a month under the McGuinty government's electricity policy.

Go 80 kilometres down the Winnipeg River into Manitoba and you've got a two-machine newsprint mill in Pine Falls, Manitoba. Their hydro bill was \$900,000 a month. One of the managers said to me, when Abitibi closed the Kenora mill, "Do you know what? Our workers could work for nothing here and it wouldn't make up for the price differential in electricity." It wouldn't make up for the almost million and a half dollars a month more they have to pay for electricity.

Germany, which in many ways leads the world in solar energy and wind energy, and which leads the world in energy efficiency, has said that they're going to have a different hydro rate for industry. Generally, the industrial

rate there is about five cents a kilowatt hour. Why? Because Germany has made the policy decision that electricity that sustains jobs should be valued like this. Electricity that is simply used to power someone's plasma television or electricity that is used to allow Harry Rosen to crank up the air conditioning and open the doors should be charged a rate that's much higher. They value jobs. They want to see jobs continue.

Sweden, another country which leads the world in energy efficiency, which leads the world in its own reduction of greenhouse gases, puts in place special energy rates for industry. Why? Because they value jobs. They want to see people continue to work. Sweden as well says: "If you want to run your plasma TV and suck up all kinds of electricity, you pay a high rate. If you want to air condition your office tower or your department store and open the doors and waste electricity, you pay a higher rate." But when it comes to electricity to sustain jobs, they want to sustain jobs.

If Manitoba can do it, if Quebec can do it, if British Columbia can do it, if Sweden can do it, if Germany can do it, where's the McGuinty government that says they care about jobs? Busy driving the industrial rate of electricity higher and higher than ever. So that's just one of the differences.

Something else has made a big difference in Manitoba: Manitoba said, "Look, manufacturing jobs are going to be the problem. We don't need to cut taxes for the banks. We don't need to cut taxes for the oil companies." God, they're rolling in money at an embarrassing level as it is. They said, "Look, manufacturing is where the problem is, and we need to find a way to help struggling manufacturers get through a difficult time." So they implemented a refundable manufacturing investment tax credit. "Refundable" is important, because what it means is that even companies that are not making a profit can apply for the tax credit. In Manitoba they didn't just do it based upon this year; they rolled it back five years and said, "If you've made investments in plants and equipment over the last five years, you can now claim those for this refundable tax credit." What has that allowed Manitoba firms to do? It has allowed them to use that refundable tax credit almost like working capital to pay the workers wages so they're not laid off, to pay for other equipment improvements or technology improvements so they don't have to shut down, so that they can reach a higher level of efficiency, so that they can pay the hydro bill and don't have to shut down. What has the McGuinty government done? Are they talking anywhere in this resolution about a refundable manufacturing investment tax credit? Nowhere at all.

Since Manitoba brought in a refundable manufacturing investment tax credit, Quebec followed suit. Saskatchewan has followed suit. Where is the McGuinty government? Well, their claim to fame is that they say they cut the capital tax. Well, who benefits most from cutting the capital tax? I can tell you, banks love it when you cut the capital tax, because for them it means opening up the vault and shovelling out the money. But do you know

what? The only thing banks need help with these days is protection from their own stupid decisions. That's what they need, protection from their own stupid decisions: investing in mortgages that never really existed in the United States and pretending to everyone that these were secure investments.

Cutting the capital tax helps oil companies. Does anybody in this Legislature want to hold up their hand and say that oil companies need help at the hands of taxpayers these days? Does any Liberal want to stand up and say that those poor oil companies need more money from government? The tax changes: Oh, yes, some manufacturers may have benefited a dot or a dash, but the tax changes have overwhelmingly been to the benefit of big oil, big banks and big finance. I feel as some people in the United States feel. Some of the people at the big banks and big finance companies should be going to jail, not getting more public money. People who have misled not just ordinary people who put their savings in a bank account but just about everybody in the economy shouldn't be getting a handout. They should be going to jail. But these are the tax changes the McGuinty government has had in mind: Help out the banks and the oil companies, but nothing targeted at manufacturing, nothing whatsoever.

Then the government says that they're investing in post-secondary education and training. If the government were truly investing in post-secondary education and training, I would suggest that Ontario would not be number 10 out of 10 provinces in Canada in terms of the per capita investment in post-secondary education and training. But that is, in fact, the record. Newfoundland invests more in post-secondary education and training than Ontario does. Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, provinces that are not generally well off, that don't have any banking headquarters in their capital towns or cities, that don't have any corporate giants or Bay Street, invest more in post-secondary education than Ontario does.

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The other thing that's been rapped out by the McGuinty government is the so-called Second Career strategy. The government says, "Oh, this is really going to cut mustard. Boy, this is really going to help people who've lost their jobs." Well, out of the more than 240,000 manufacturing jobs that have been lost in Ontario, do you know that fewer than 1,000 people have signed up for the so-called Second Career strategy? It's a success rate of less than one half of 1%. My 10-year-old would understand that. He would come home from school and say, "Daddy, that's not a very good mark at all," somebody who gets less than one half of 1% take-up on the so-called Second Career strategy. But if you look at the government ads on TV, according to the McGuinty government, this is the be-all and end-all. This is really making a difference in the lives of working people who've lost their jobs. Less than one half of 1% take-up is pathetic. The government should pull its ads off television today and should go back to the drawing board and ask themselves what are they doing wrong.

New Democrats have offered what we think are some practical solutions. We believe we should do what Germany has done, what Sweden has done, what Britain has done and what Quebec has done and recognize that if we're going to keep manufacturing jobs in this province, we need a reasonable industrial hydro rate. We should do what Manitoba, Quebec and Saskatchewan have done in terms of taxes: not a corporate tax cut, but a targeted refundable manufacturing investment tax credit to help companies that are struggling to stay alive so they don't have to lay off more workers.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm pleased to stand and speak on the motion made by Premier Dalton McGuinty on October 8 about the economy. We heard the Premier speaking about the financial situation which is facing the province of Ontario.

As you know, we don't live in isolation. We live in an international economy. We live near a huge country. This is a country on which we depend a lot in many different areas, whether the housing industry, the manufacturing industry or the financial industry.

I have been listening to the speakers from both sides. I have been listening to the Conservatives speaking for the last two weeks, talking about this crisis and their solution to the crisis. They're talking about solving it by cutting taxes. We lived in the province of Ontario when the Conservatives were in government for eight years. What they did was cut taxes, eliminate many different jobs, take money away from the poor people, and there was not much investment in the social areas. What happened? It led to a disaster in our communities across Ontario and led the province to a deficit of more than \$5 billion. We witnessed a deficit in infrastructure of more than \$100 billion across the province: in roads, highways, bridges, sewer systems and many different areas. We witnessed a deficit in the education sector of more than \$20 billion. We witnessed many different deficits in health care and higher education.

Since 2002, we've witnessed migration of jobs, which we acknowledge today. Jobs are moving to different parts of the globe, to China and to India. I know my colleague from Danforth was speaking for 10 minutes about the strategy, how we can overcome and absorb the new era, in which the Chinese and Indians, with more than a billion people, have the financial capacity and intellectual capacity to produce more and control the economy. How can we survive with 32 million people, or at least as Ontario, with 12 million or 13 million people? We found the best solution: to reinvest in our infrastructure. We invested more than \$30 billion since we got elected, to date more than \$60 billion, because we thought this investment would allow us to make Ontario a place where you can commute fast and quick, a place that can attract more businesses to open in this province.

We invested in higher education because we believe strongly that the next generation of jobs will be high-tech jobs. I was pleased to do a statement this afternoon about

our investments in research and innovation, which go to many different institutions, including universities and research centres, to help them to continue to do research in nanotechnology and physics and many areas in order to allow us, as a province, to continue to compete at an international level.

I think our investments are in the right place.

I think our economic situation is not unique. I was listening to the third party leader speaking a few minutes ago. He was talking about how the only solution to fix the economy is by reducing the electricity rate, as if by reducing the electricity rate we can stop the departure of jobs. He was talking about the forest industry and paper mills. He forgot that we depend a lot on the economy of the United States. If the United States economy is not able to buy the wood to build houses, how can we sell it? Do we just want to cut it and produce it to go nowhere—or paper mills, with new technologies where many people use the Internet and e-mails instead of letters and printing papers? So I think the most important things are to keep investing and utilizing our capacity in this province and investing in our people to be able to overcome the results of the next generations. He was talking about the manufacturers, how there's no investment and no strategy in the manufacturing area. We have a strategy called the Next Generation of Jobs Fund, where we've put almost \$1.5 billion. Most of the manufacturing companies in Ontario have a right to access those funds if they want to develop their areas—buy new machinery, green machinery—in order to maintain the jobs and also to be able to compete by buying new technology and hiring more people.

I give you this example: Our government invested in a company called Diamond Aircraft for the last three or four years. We gave them support. They started with 500 people, and now there are about 1,000 people working at Diamond Aircraft. Now their productivity has doubled, and they sell all across the globe due to our investment in this company.

We didn't just invest money in companies. We also invested money in colleges and universities, especially Fanshawe College, to give them the ability to produce skilled workers to feed those companies. This is our initiative: to work alongside colleges, universities, training centres and manufacturing companies in order to create a strategy of people working together to produce workers who will be absorbed by manufacturers that reside in Ontario.

Interjection.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Fanshawe College, one of the most important colleges in the whole country.

Also, we invested in a company called Original Cakerie, which came from British Columbia. They came to the province of Ontario to open in London almost a year ago. They believe strongly that this province is the right province in which to open because we have a strategic spot, connected to both Michigan and New York state, and also because we have skilled workers and we have a government that understands that the most import-

ant thing is to attract people by creating an environment where people are able to work, where workers can send their people to college or university, a place where if they get sick they can be treated, and a place to be able to sell their products—and a government that's able to understand them and give them the ability to build and get the support they need in order to build in this province.

We know this economic situation is not just in Ontario, not just in Canada. When we turn on the TV or radio in the morning or evening or whenever, we hear about it in China, we hear about it in the United States, we hear about it in France, in England and in many, many jurisdictions around the globe. My friend who came from Italy not a long time ago was telling me about the economic situation in Italy: the manufacturing jobs and layoffs and many different problems facing the economy in Italy. So we're not unique. I think we in the province of Ontario have been preparing for it since we got elected in 2003, reinvesting in our people, reinvesting in our infrastructure, reinvesting in education, reinvesting in health care, because all of these elements work together to attract more people or maintain jobs in the province of Ontario. So we don't think we don't have a problem. But do you know what? Leadership counts when you have a problem. You try to work and absorb it; you try to manage it and get out of it strong and able and building for next generations.

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I was pleased when the Premier stood up on October 8 in this place and acknowledged the financial situation we are facing and put forward his five-point plan to manage our lives for generations to come. I think it took courage from the Premier to address this issue. Acknowledgment is the most important thing—an important plan, because we are obligated as a province and as elected officials to address these issues, and we're obligated to serve our people, who put their trust in us. Due to our investment, due to our acknowledgement, due to our plan, I think we're going to get out of it stronger than ever.

I'm proud to be part of a government that addresses these issues and deals with them, that is not afraid and that doesn't run away from them. Despite what the opposition is saying about cutting taxes, I think cutting taxes will destroy our economy. Just creating a model from British Columbia or Manitoba, or whatever the third party is talking about, doesn't address the issue. The most important thing to deal with it is a solution produced in Ontario for Ontarians. Due to the leadership we have today, I think we are going to be stronger than ever.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Hillier: I am going to speak on this motion, and I think it's important that we recognize a few things as we start off. This is another motion on the floor of the House by the Liberals. What you can always tell about the Liberals is that they like going through the motions. That's all it is: going through the motions of rhetoric and platitudes, hollowness and empty words. When you look at this motion, there is nothing in it that is

measurable; there is nothing in it that is accountable. It's empty and hollow. The only thing this motion does is provide an excuse for the Liberal government, as if they haven't already used up enough excuses.

They list some of the challenges we are facing. Certainly those challenges are here now; they're in our face. But they have been with us for some time, as we on this side of the House have mentioned. What they fail to do is mention the challenges we're facing that we can control, that we can influence, that we can have an effect on. We know that the value of the dollar is a factor. We know that global economic trade with China and Third World countries is a significant factor. But there are things we do and things we must do in this province if we are going to have a strong, vibrant economy that can pay for the infrastructure, that can pay for the social necessities, that can pay for a good, strong society.

Some of the things we can do: the red tape and regulations this Liberal government has a strong thirst and desire to promote. The number of people I hear from, and I'm sure every member on the other side of the House also hears from their constituents—when I was in estimates last week, one of this government's own members, Joe Dickson, mentioned the problem Ministry of Labour inspectors are placing on businesses in his riding, Ministry of Labour inspectors who are putting businesses out of business. These people are called jobs protection officers, but in essence and in reality they have become job destruction officers.

I know Liberal backbenchers are facing those same concerns, but is there anything in this motion about it? Nothing. There is silence from the opposing side over there, the government side—silence about doing things. What they like to promote is that they can't. They like to promote excuses and can'ts.

We have seen significant destruction throughout rural Ontario and other places with red tape and regulations that are excessive, that are intrusive, that are counter-productive and that are killing our economy. Recently, Forfar Cheese announced that they were closing up their production of cheese in eastern Ontario because of another regulation and the way it's being enforced by this Liberal government. This company has been making cheese for 150 years, and an inspector comes in and says, "You can't make cheese any more. You're a danger to the groundwater." For 150 years that cheese plant has been there, and never once did it harm the groundwater, but it can't stay in business with this Liberal government.

There's more—lots more.

Bar owners in my area such as Fiddleheads' Erik Kafrissen and Patrick Moore are faced with ministry inspectors coming in and closing down their bars on spurious allegations, no evidence, and there's no appeal mechanism. These bar owners are honest, responsible, upstanding business people in our communities, but they are fearful of the Liberal government and its army of inspectors that they have let loose in the countryside, and they have every right to be.

I spoke with Gary Oosterhof the other day. His electrical contracting business is under attack. He's lost three

quarters of a million dollars in revenue and has paid \$135 in fees because of a card-based certification rule put in place by this Liberal government. He went from nine employees to four.

I think the overarching theme that I hear is, "How do you start a small business in this province? Start with a big one," because this Liberal government is going to make it smaller and smaller and smaller until it is gone. And it is everywhere. Whether it's manufacturing, whether it is retail, whether it is construction, this Liberal government is at fault. You cannot excuse what you have done to these people in our communities.

There is a reason why we are in last place in this Confederation, and the reason is over there. There are about 70 reasons why Ontario is in last place economically in this country—the policies and the implementation of this Liberal government.

I was in estimates as well with the research minister a short while ago. The research minister had the same rhetoric, the same platitudes that we see in this motion. He talked of commercializing new technology here in Ontario, spoke of Ontario being the leader in technology. I asked him why, then, the Bath cement plant has been trying for five years to get new technology installed and they are hamstrung and handcuffed at every opportunity by this Liberal government. For five years, they've been trying to move forward. For five years, the ministers on the other side have prevented investments and technology, other than the investments in bureaucracy, and killed our economy.

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They've done the same thing with Perth Soap, another place where new technology can make that 100-year-old business be competitive with China, with India, with Mexico. But this government has diddled and dithered for a year, while Perth Soap winds up and winds down their production.

We all have an obligation in this House to do our utmost, to do our duty, to be responsible, not just to be a voting machine for cabinet and for the bureaucracy. The members on the government side have to begin to take ownership of their own failings and the failings that they have put on everybody in Ontario. We've heard them all. Karl's butcher shop was closed up here in the Toronto area because of red tape and regulation. Those are the themes: They talk about research and innovation, and then they slam the door on it with regulation. We get red tape and we get smaller and smaller businesses, and at the same time our public sector costs increase—more public sector employees, fewer private sector employees. This cannot continue. I'm sure everybody on the government side realizes that it can't continue. You can't keep driving people out of business and then expect to be able to tax them, as well. It doesn't work that way.

The member from London—Fanshawe talked about the deficit that they inherited: deficits in education, health care, a multitude of deficits. There is a deficit that they inherited—I don't know if they inherited it, but I know they have it now. It's a deficit in attitude, it's a deficit in

conviction, it's a deficit in thinking. You have to do what the people have elected us to do.

We have a new piece of legislation coming in from WSIB which is going to affect more small businesses and put more small businesses out of business.

As we talk about this motion here in this House, think back to just a week or so ago. What were the Liberals doing about it? Of course, the economic development was hard at work. Sandra of Arabia was travelling the dunes of time looking for development. After her great trip to the Great Wall, where are the returns from all these development—

Mr. Mike Colle: On a point of order, Speaker: It is proper procedure to refer to a member by their riding, and not by some derogatory term, as this member has done. He should apologize and use the riding name.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I acknowledge that you raised a point. I just want to remind members to try, when you can recall, as much as possible, to use the name of the riding, as opposed to naming members by name. That's been the practice in the Legislature.

Please continue.

Mr. Randy Hillier: The cost of doing business in this province is what is harming our economy. This motion doesn't address the cost of doing business. If the Liberals were committed and had conviction about improving our economy, they would begin to lower the cost of doing business. They would put in some measurable outcomes in this motion, demonstrate to the people of Ontario that they are indeed committed to having outcomes that we can measure, that we can work toward, instead of just rhetoric.

The examples continue: Gene and Marsha Countryman and their winery shop, a fruit winery in eastern Ontario, can't get through the regulatory maze that this Liberal government has constructed for them. They make a fine product that's well priced, but they can't get it to market because of Liberal red tape.

The evidence is clear for all those who choose to look. You can remain with your head in the sand or you can choose to look at what needs to be done, and it is not going through the motions; it is standing up and doing what is right and stopping what is wrong.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I am pleased to be able to rise and speak to the motion that was put before the Legislature by the Premier.

I want to say a few things at the outset, and I know there is a lot of discussion that has already occurred and a lot that will occur in the future. We face rather significant challenges as a province. Members have spoken to these, and will. They are challenges that are quite unlike what we have faced for many years, not only individually but culminatively. They are challenges which will affect our future, as they are affecting our present.

We face significant difficulties in our communities—I'll speak about mine in a moment—and individual

members face significant difficulties, but I am confident that we will overcome the challenges and the difficulties. We will overcome the challenges and the difficulties as long as we all recognize what the Premier has encouraged us all to do, which is to work together to find the common solutions, to take from every one of us our very best and to rest those great ideas for the future on the firm foundation that we have in the province of Ontario. Let us be clear: The people of Ontario have encountered many challenges in the past and will encounter many in the future, and we have met and overcome every single one.

I want to speak about my community. I want to speak about London and southwestern Ontario.

I want to speak first about the workers who have lost their jobs or who are living in uncertainty. I want those workers to know that they do not stand alone and their families do not stand alone. We all stand with them: stand with them in our determination to keep their jobs when they are at risk, stand with them in our determination to support them through difficult times, and stand with them in our determination, when their jobs do leave, to support them to find new opportunities.

A community is only as strong as every member of it. A community can never reach its potential until every single member of that community reaches their potential. So we will all stand and support the workers who have faced difficulty, and there have been recent difficulties with the truck plant in our neighbouring community of St. Thomas. I know the Premier and my colleagues, including my colleague from Elgin–Middlesex–London, Mr. Peters, are working very hard to support those in the community and the CAW who are trying to keep the jobs there, and will continue to work very hard.

Ours is a government which recognizes the importance of strategic partnerships. There is no one philosophy that has all the answers for job retention.

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And I must say that after months and years of our calling for the federal government to support strategic partnerships in the province of Ontario, after having some ministers of the federal government say no to strategic partnerships, I was very pleased to see, just on the eve of the election, the federal government recognize the importance of strategic partnerships in Windsor and in St. Catharines, both in the automotive sector.

I say that I was very pleased to see that, and as somebody who lives in London, who lives beside the 401, who knows about the St. Thomas Ford assembly plant, I say I'm very pleased about the federal government's interest in strategic partnerships. I am looking forward to working with them as we work to support new product development at the Ford plant in St. Thomas, one where thousands of workers have toiled very hard over the years, and many workers are there now, working very hard, supporting not only communities in Elgin county, but those in my community as well.

I say that as we look to the jobs that will replace those that have departed, we're facing a different kind of job.

When the Ford plant in St. Thomas opened up in 1967, you could get a job there without having completed grade 8. The new Toyota assembly plant that was spearheaded by the Premier's automotive strategy is about to start production later this year, not far from London, in Woodstock. They had almost 50,000 applications for those jobs—and you couldn't get an interview without having completed secondary school—

Interjection: For how many jobs?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: For 2,000 jobs.

You couldn't get an interview without secondary school education plus something beyond, some post-secondary of some description. The landscape has changed. It is why we have been investing in retraining, new skills, post-secondary education and advanced skills training. It's why we've been doing that for four years, almost five years now.

So let me speak to the jobs of the future and the opportunities that it presents not only for Ontario, but I want to focus on my community in London and in southwestern Ontario. Although we are facing significant challenges, we have the foundation for a bright future, and as long as we work together and pool our collective and individual strengths, we will meet those challenges. Be clear: We are in for some very challenging times, and it is going to take every one of us at our best to meet those challenges. But we will—we will succeed.

Now, in London, we are very pleased to have two great post-secondary education institutions. The University of Western Ontario and Fanshawe College provide post-secondary education and advanced skills training not simply to the London community, not simply to southwestern Ontario, but to people from across the country. Indeed, we have people coming from around the world to those institutions. They are institutions of excellence. There is in those institutions a very bright future. And we are located not far from our sister institutions in Kitchener–Waterloo, Windsor, and Guelph. Southwestern Ontario has a great foundation—as well as Sarnia with Lambton College—post-secondary education.

The jobs of the future require post-secondary education or skills training; almost 80% of the jobs of the future will require it. That's why I'm very pleased that in London, we have the great post-secondary institutions. And that's why the Premier launched the Reaching Higher plan: to make sure we invested in extra spaces, over 100,000 more students throughout Ontario—more at Western and Fanshawe. That's why we invested in more professors, more money for research, more supports for the students who couldn't otherwise afford to go. At last count, there were almost 150,000 students receiving some form of assistance through grants, which the NDP cut, or assistance so they could attend post-secondary education, which probably explains why we have more than 100,000 extra students in post-secondary education than when we started, and why we have the highest rate of post-secondary education in the western world—the highest in the western world. It is the foundation for success, because the jobs of the future require it.

We don't stop there. We go to advanced skills training of all sorts. For many years, the government of Ontario attempted to negotiate, and then decided it wouldn't negotiate, a labour market development agreement with the federal government. I was pleased, just a couple of years ago, that I was able to sign a labour market development agreement with the government of Canada, so we now have a billion dollars to support the retraining or initial skills training of the people of Ontario.

I am also pleased, notwithstanding that we deliver those dollars through 1,200 different agencies and 900 different locations throughout Ontario, that you can access any of those training agents through a toll-free number or a website anywhere in Ontario. And if your first language isn't English or French, you can get information about them through a translation service in almost 150 different languages.

Mr. Mike Colle: Even Italian.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Even Italian, my colleague tells me.

We're trying to not only make the services available for people, but easily available, so that no matter where you are, you can find the services you need. That is of great assistance to people in our community of London and of great assistance to people in every part of the province.

What else does London have that will enable it to attract the jobs of the future? I speak of infrastructure next. Of course, power: Not far away, we have the Bruce nuclear facility, many of the workers at which are trained at Fanshawe College, a special program to train the workers. I'm pleased that they are refitting some of the reactors, and there is going to be a new transmission line to bring power down to southwestern Ontario. It is essential to have a good power source. We are not blessed, as are Manitoba or Quebec, by the natural accident of geography, so we rely on other forms of power, and I'm pleased that we have taken the lead and are ensuring power supply for the future.

We have something else that many other jurisdictions don't have. We're located right beside the 401, one of the most travelled pieces of highway in the world. We can reach not only across Canada but far into the midwest, the northeast or the south of the United States in virtually no time. Linked very closely to the 402-401 intersection, linked also to the 401-403 intersection, it is a fabulous location for business.

We have seen what has happened at the 401-403 interchange. We have seen the economic development there with Toyota and the related spinoffs. But if you go to 401-402, part of which is located within the jurisdiction of the city of London, there is an opportunity there, because there is very little there but green. There is an opportunity there for all, a great platform for economic development in the future.

We saw what happened with the innovation park, and I'm pleased that we put an extra \$11 million into the innovation park in London. It's virtually full. If you service the land, business will come and establish. We

have those opportunities to attract and to ensure, both within and just on the outskirts of our community in London.

We are an innovative and creative community. My colleague the member from London-Fanshawe mentioned Diamond Aircraft. It's true that there, in London, Ontario, they are building planes that are used by the United States Army for training, that are used by aircraft industries throughout the world. And as the D-JET comes into production, they are high-skilled jobs—over 650 of them now, I believe, and still growing, from what just a few years ago was virtually nothing.

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We have been able to do it in the city of London, but the story doesn't end there, of course. We have Trojan Technologies, which provides clean water technology throughout the world, with an opportunity to do even more—a business that's been recognized throughout the province of Ontario and internationally for the work that they do.

We have Trudell medical devices, and there's a real opportunity in London for medical devices. Trudell medical devices, which sells medical devices throughout the world, is a long-established, internationally recognized business in London. Of course, we have the reserve capacity and facilities at the University of Western Ontario in the Robarts Research Institute, in CSTAR.

The fact of the matter is that the foundation's there, and I speak to the foundation because although these will be very challenging times, it's important to recognize the opportunities for success. Although these will be challenging times, we have the ability to help people through them. Although these will be challenging times, we have the opportunity to ensure that businesses, working with government, working with the community, such as the chamber of commerce in London, the London economic development community, have an opportunity to establish and succeed in London as so many others have.

We recognize in our community that there are those who need our help today and will need our help tomorrow. We'll be there to help them. But we also recognize that we have the means to assist them in retraining and finding the jobs of the future in a community that has always supported the jobs of the future and a community that looks forward to supporting the jobs of the future and that will enable and help those jobs and those businesses to succeed.

I ask all members and all members of the community to come forward with their best advice, to come forward with their best ideas, because it will take us all at our best to succeed, but succeed we will; succeed we will, Speaker. I look forward to working with my colleagues on all sides of the House and with the federal and municipal governments as we work to meet the challenges of the future.

I just speak to one little initiative that was maybe overlooked by my colleagues from the party opposite; that is, making the regulatory burden less onerous for businesses. We've started that initiative. I'm pleased to

indicate to the members of the House that I have been speaking—and I know my colleagues Khalil Ramal and Deb Matthews have—with Gerry Macartney, the CEO of our chamber of commerce, on how we can get to a point where we not only reduce the regulatory burden but we make it so much easier for businesses to find out what regulations and rules they must comply with in government, and that they might be able in the future to find out what all those rules and regulations are through one-stop shopping, something the colleagues opposite in the other parties never did accomplish but something which really could succeed for the future.

Interjection.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Now my friend opposite says he got rid of them, but he didn't; he just changed their nature and relabelled. Real progress will come when a business can find out all of its regulatory requirements through one-stop shopping.

As I say, I look forward to speaking with all of the members of the House and the members of my community as we face the real challenges for the future.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased today to speak on this economic resolution because, of course, today is the beginning of Small Business Week. I think the one thing that we can all agree on in this chamber is that small business is the financial backbone of Ontario and our economy. Over 98% of Ontario's economy relies on small business.

But I must change from that to talk about what I see with the McGuinty Liberals. They talk about a five-point plan, and what I see on this side of the bench is a three-point plan. The three points are big spending, big taxing and job-crushing policies. I would like to cover off those as we go through debating this economic resolution, because it is critically important that we finally start talking about things that people are concerned about.

In my riding of Dufferin-Caledon we've had some terrible job losses. In Shelburne just recently, Setex has closed up shop—270 jobs; in Bolton, Brite Manufacturing, 100 jobs—100 families out of work; in Orangeville, Greening Donald closed down—300 jobs. So there are many of us who go back to our ridings and talk to people who are nervous, who are reading the newspapers, who are not immune to what we see in the media reports and want to have our government legislators actually talking about how to improve the situation.

If I talk about the three-point McGuinty plan of big spending, big taxing and job-crushing policies, let's start with the big spending. Government program spending is up \$87 billion. That started at \$64 billion in 2003-04. Someone, somewhere is going to say, "Well, those are all critically important jobs." I have no doubt that they are, but they are not part of keeping Ontario's economy strong. While the private sector has shed thousands of jobs, primarily in the manufacturing area, the public sector has posted gains of 114,000, or approximately a 10% increase. If you break that down further, education

employment is up 8% over the year, health care and social assistance is up 4%, and public administration has soared 13%. I am not sure if I would be able to explain to a constituent across a table what public administration is, but I have concerns that it would involve more spin doctors than doctors and nurses.

The other tie-in to the public sector jobs is something from Stats Canada. Since October 2003, Ontario has created more public sector jobs than any other province and has the second-lowest rate of private sector job creation. In fact, since October 2003, Ontario has created more public sector jobs than all other provinces combined, and nearly four times as many public sector jobs as Alberta. I don't think there's any doubt that when the economy is going well, when governments are putting out policies that are being proactive and making economies strong, there is a call and an ability to say we need to invest more in health and education—but more public sector jobs than all other provinces combined, including the province of Alberta? I need to have someone explain how you can justify that when we are facing very challenging economic times.

Let's be honest: This is not something new that happened in September or October 2008. This is a crisis and an issue that we saw coming, that we have been talking about, quite frankly, in the Progressive Conservative Party for quite some time.

So we have to rein in that runaway spending. We have to rein in the desire to always want more employees, to always want bigger programs. There is a role for government, absolutely. But there is also a responsibility for government to be judicious and to be reasonable and responsible when deciding how to use those taxpayer dollars.

1520

The second point of the three-point McGuinty plan of big spending, big taxing and job-crushing policies is big taxing. What have we done in terms of taxation? The obvious one is the one-time, huge increase of the health tax. It currently is pulling out \$2.7 billion per year in Ontario's economy. Total revenue that this government is collecting is up, \$91 billion from \$68.4 billion, and personal tax revenue is up. So while we are faced, back in our ridings and in our homes and talking to our constituents, with individuals who are dealing with MPAC increases and hydro costs that are increasing beyond their control, we also, quite frankly, have a government that is taxing beyond their control.

Those are three aspects that Ontario taxpayers and Ontario business people can't control. We all—in our own jobs, in our own households—try to manage how much money comes in, how much money gets spent out. The reality is, when government taxes us more, when the hydro rate goes up, when MPAC brings in 25% increases, we can't control that. As governments, I think we have to do a better job of being cognizant and being aware of what is happening out there beyond these walls.

The other thing that I wanted to talk about was the job-crushing policies, because this is something that the

Greater Dufferin Area Chamber of Commerce and other manufacturing businesses have spoken to me about in the riding. I met recently with the Greater Dufferin Area Chamber of Commerce and they talked about some of the things that they would like to see government do, because while it is easy to talk about the negatives in opposition, I think there is a role, as well, for us to come forward with some proactive suggestions. So part of my role as a provincial member of Parliament is to meet with the manufacturers and to meet with the chambers and hear from them what they recommend.

From that meeting with the Greater Dufferin Area Chamber of Commerce, they make reference to the fact that they would “like to see, through tax credits, perhaps, some recognition of the millions of finite resources (both financial and time) that companies spend training employees to ensure we are compliant with the myriad of government regulations. Not only is this type of training costly, but it often inhibits companies, especially smaller ones, from investing in training that might actually move the firm ahead. If you’re not convinced the financial burden is significant, then we suggest the government should pay directly to have all the workers trained, according to the regulations.” Actually, it’s a nice tie-in to something that the Canadian Federation of Independent Business has brought forward, which is to say that \$13 billion annually is being spent by businesses to comply with government regulations, and government regulations, quite frankly, that are a bit of a moving target.

They raise an excellent point, and I would like to continue reading from the chamber’s letter to me: “Finally, we seek your advice. We are looking for ways to ensure that all the government rules and regulations that are passed, all the new government initiatives that are launched, all the good work that you are doing to help us, be disseminated in a meaningful, targeted way and not just made available through portals in the ether”—those are the famous websites that the ministers often quote from when they are responding to questions in question period. “Communication requires more than just making stuff available. Like sound, it requires two basic elements, a sender and a receiver”—and this is the chamber talking. “If I can’t hear you, or don’t even know you are trying to communicate, well, we won’t be very successful.”

It raises a point that they talked about in a great amount of detail, which was that so many of the regulations are now out on the Internet. In my riding in particular, there are large areas and large groups of the population—up to 20% to 25% in Dufferin county, actually—that don’t have access to high-speed Internet. So what happens is that they are spending an inordinate amount of their staff time, first, trying to find out what changes and what regulations have been made or changed, and then of course they transfer that into assigning the responsibility to people. In a company of 2,000 people, maybe that’s not a big issue. The companies that I’m dealing with and, quite frankly, that the vast majority

of us would be dealing with are companies of 200 or less. When you pull your HR person or when you pull one of your management team of three aside to review, figure out, the intent and then build the training for a new regulation, there is a cost to the company, both financially and, of course, in the time for that person not to do something else.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business, on that note, has some suggestions. They are suggesting that you look at waiving fines, penalties and back charges for first-time, innocent non-compliance with government regulations, and “provide a single point of contact that can reliably inform me of all my obligations as a business owner in Ontario.” I think that’s an important one to point out, because part of the frustration that small businesses and manufacturing firms in Ontario have to deal with is that they’re not even sure which ministry they need to be talking to to find out what regulation has changed. So, we have business numbers; we have lots of ways to communicate that don’t just rely on someone spewing out a website and saying, “Go there; it’s all there.”

Finally, from the CFIB, Canadian Federation of Independent Business: “Train provincial inspectors to help small businesses deal” with the rules properly, “rather than slapping them with orders, fines or penalties.” If we are going to make changes, whether they be formally through the form of legislation or, ultimately, regulation, I believe we have a responsibility to communicate those changes more proactively to our partners in the business sector. We would not make a rule that says, “If you’re under 16, you need to have a helmet to ride your bicycle in Ontario,” and not tell anyone, yet we seem to do that far too often with our provincial businesses and manufacturers across Ontario. There will be a rule change that happens through cabinet and through regulation, and nobody bothers to discuss or ultimately inform the manufacturers and small businesses that are most obviously affected.

As I pointed out before, the regulatory burden on business is currently estimated to be \$13 billion annually. That’s an awful lot of R and D; we could be changing our resources and focusing on that. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business told the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs that 66% of their survey respondents said the overall burden of provincial regulation has increased during the past three years. Since 2003, this government has created 437 new regulations, and they’ve revoked only 81.

I want to talk about this, because in the Liberal platform that’s a year and eight days old, there is, in their promise to Ontarians, a comment where they talk about regulations, under “Maintain Strong Fiscal Management”: “Reduce the paper burden on business through a ‘cap and trade’ system for government regulations. Every time a new regulation is put in place, an old one will have to be removed.” Tell me how creating 437 new regulations and revoking only 81 is a cap and trade on regulations.

1530

You made a promise to the Ontario voters—that they trusted you would actually fulfill—that said you would not create another regulation without eliminating an existing one. And yet we see, obviously, that has not happened: 437 new regulations have been created, and you have removed only 81. Where does that leave the Ontario voter, the Ontario taxpayer, the Ontario business person who says, “How can I trust a government which publicizes a document a year ago that means absolutely nothing”? There is no way that you can justify creating 437 new regulations when you promised—when you made a commitment—to eliminate one for one. You clearly have not done that. So where is the trust that Ontario voters, Ontario business people can have in a McGuinty Liberal government which promises one thing just over a year ago and does quite another?

Keep in mind that this is all happening when, in the last month, they've been receiving their MPAC proposals. We have municipal property assessment letters and flyers coming in the mail. In my riding, the general increase is sitting at around 20% to 25%. And you are saying, “We didn't want to talk about this during the election, so instead, we're going to freeze it. We're going to freeze it during the course of the election.” It's a wonderful little Liberal system. And now what we have is MPAC property assessments that are going up 25%. There is not a taxpayer in Dufferin-Caledon who can accept that without some kind of reaction to a Liberal government which promised one thing and gave us quite another.

I have to quote from the newspaper on this one, because I loved how he phrased it. “The problem for us and for most others is that we” purchased our home “in a particular area because we like it and not to be land speculators. We need a system of property tax assessment that doesn't penalize those who just want to be able to afford to live in a home.”

Interjections.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Someone is a little disturbed. “I haven't even gotten to the plight of those on fixed incomes.”

It is unfortunate that instead of talking in a reasonable way, we have come to the point where we have to yell across the House, instead of actually listening to the ideas that are coming forward.

Interjections.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm quoting from the Liberal platform, and the response seems to be: “I'll just yell louder and be more aggressive, and then I'll be right.” Is that what we have come to in this chamber? It's a little rich, coming from the other side.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Come to order, please.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Back to the MPAC: As I pointed out, these are the same taxpayers who are receiving assessment values that are rising in the 25% to 30% range. And because there is no cap—during the election,

we proposed a cap—they're going to have to downsize their home or sell their house, because they can't afford that kind of increase. If you're on a fixed income, if you're looking at your pension or your job disappearing because of the economic system that we have right now, then it's not a very pleasant time to be looking at the Liberal government and saying, “Why aren't you fulfilling some of the things that you actually committed to in your platform?”

It's unfortunate that although this debate was set up as an opportunity to listen to debate, we're instead yelling across the floor.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I want to welcome the citizens of Ontario to this political forum. It's 3:35. We are on live, and on Rogers, it's cable 105, right up there. I don't know that there's anything much higher than that—that's it. So welcome to this political forum. It's one of the best shows in town. This is true.

Today we're debating a resolution moved by the Liberal government, including an amendment made by my own colleague from Beaches-East York. I've got to tell you, I am so excited, with so many Liberals, having an opportunity to speak when the Premier said to the Liberal members, “You boys and women, go out there and enjoy yourselves as much as you can.” I am amazed and happy to see the minister, the Attorney General, take almost 20 minutes for this resolution. That is how important this is. The federal election is over, and yet we have so many individual Liberal members and ministers taking the time, all of the time, if needed, to debate this resolution. It's a rare thing to witness, because most of the time most Liberal MPPs have very little to say, and yet on this resolution, which has nothing, says nothing, we have a whole lot of members who are going to speak to it. We could be here for the whole week debating this resolution, if you can believe that.

My sense, citizens of Ontario, is that the Liberals have nothing on their plate. They have nothing on their agenda. They're scrambling to create some bill or other to present to this place in order to be able to hold us here until the second week of December. That's how I see it. I could be wrong. I could. I don't want to say that I am prescient in any way, because I don't believe I have that ability, but it seems to me that the Liberals have nothing, or so little, to debate that we are discussing a resolution that speaks about a five-point plan that is failing so utterly that I don't understand why they're debating it. Because, look—

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Speaker, just to tell you a little bit about the job losses; this is why I don't understand why they would be talking about their five-point plan. It's presented as a way of suggesting that their plan is working, is it not? Yet, if the plan is working, was working, will be working, here are the losses, just to give you a sense of the tremendous job losses we've had in this province for the last couple of years: Sterling Truck,

St. Thomas—700 jobs plus, 600 announced earlier, sayonara, gone; DDM Plastics, an auto supplier of Tillsonburg—430 jobs gone; John Deere, Welland—800 jobs; Henniges Automotive, a.k.a. GDX Automotive, of Welland—300 jobs along the 401 gone; PPG Canada, Mississauga and Owen Sound—320 jobs gone; Volvo, Goderich—500 jobs, au revoir to those jobs; Abitibi-Bowater, Thunder Bay—hours reduced for 150 workers; AbitibiBowater, Thorold, closed plant during November—au revoir to 480 jobs; Toyota, Woodstock, postponed plans for a second shift at their sport utility plant; Progressive Moulded plastics in the GTA—2,000 jobs; Magna's Formet Industries factory, St. Thomas—400 jobs. It's important to keep this in mind as they speak about their five-point plan.

I would rather be hiding my tail as best I could than showing it, because the plan isn't working. Some manufacturing statistics that I think are useful: Manufacturing sales in Ontario decreased 3.1% between July and August—doesn't bode well. Primary metal manufacturers experienced a 13.4% drop from July to August. The transportation equipment industry also reported lower sales in August as sales decreased 4.2% between July and August. Investment in machinery and equipment declined 1.9% last quarter. Investment in new residential structures declined 3% in the last quarter.

October 20 Management Issue Survey results, a poll that was done by reaching into approximately 1,300 companies across Canada: 80% of respondents expressed a negative sentiment toward rising costs on transportation and shipping materials and energy, and 34% of respondents are expecting their sales to decline in 2009, compared with only 17% who believe their top lines will grow next year. The outlook for investment is also negative, with only one third expecting to increase spending on production facilities, machinery, equipment and research and development in either 2008 or 2009. At least 14% expect to decrease investment in these areas over the next two years.

1540

Things are not looking good. The five-point plan is not working. Why highlight a plan that is in dire straits? Why highlight a plan that, when seen in the context of these tremendous job losses, makes you look bad as a government? That's why I don't understand why so many Liberals are hungry to debate a resolution that doesn't look good on them. Why would the Attorney General—in the past, the minister responsible for post-secondary education—talk about a Reaching Higher plan that is failing us? What is the Reaching Higher plan? They call it an investment of \$6 billion in the post-secondary education system. They speak of it as a plus, as a great achievement.

Interjection: It is.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: A number of folks in this place who are Liberal are saying, "It is." The reason they say that is because they know nothing about where we stand in the ranking vis-à-vis the other provinces in Canada. We are number 10—numero dieci, numéro dix—last

in ranking in Canada when it comes to per capita funding in the post-secondary educational system.

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Pardon?

Mr. Mike Colle: U of T, McMaster—they're great schools.

Interjection: You can't debate from the—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Sure he can. Let him. Besides, he's my friend. Michael, sit down.

Number 10. They speak of that with pride. You do, right? You've all got smiles as you talk about that, and you are number 10. I would hide that as a fact, because that fact only makes you look bad in the context of Canada. Within your own context, you could say, "We've increased funding to the post-secondary sector." Okay. That, in and of itself, makes you look good if you compare it to no one. But when you realize that your investment, the one that Bob Rae, my former friend, talked about—he did the study recommending tuition increases, which I strongly disagreed with, and also recommended that you increase your funding. What did you do? You increased tuition fees, and a hefty one at that, whacking a whole lot of university students with tremendous debt. Then Bob Rae said, "If you do that, you've got to increase your investment." So the government said, "Okay, we'll do that too." So they increase their investment, and where does that leave us? At last place in Canada.

Mr. Mike Colle: But what about U of T and McMaster? You haven't talked about those.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: No, you're going to talk about that when your turn comes; you or your colleague is going to talk about it. You see, as a New Democrat, I have to make my points, and then you make yours. The point is: Your investments were supposed to take us to the middle of the pack. That's what Bob Rae said, and that's what Bob Rae thought. Your funding was going to lead us in that middle range. And where are you? Proudly last—number 10—and all of you keep on saying it. This is why I make fun of you each time you say it. You say you made a \$6-billion investment, and I say, "You're number 10; don't forget that." That's part of your grand scheme, the five-point success plan, which is failing us. This is why we make fun of some of the things you say. Clearly they're not working very well.

Mr. Mike Colle: Our schools in Ontario are the best in Canada.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Our schools, member from Eglinton-Lawrence, are not doing very well. At the elementary level, we have higher class sizes from grades four to eight. We have more special education kids without support in regular classrooms than ever before. If you're going to have a special education kid in the classroom, you need an educational assistant, at least, to support the regular teacher. We don't have them.

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Sorry, Dave?

Mr. Dave Levac: It depends.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: It depends on nothing. We have fewer people getting the attention they need as a

result of Minister Papatello, formerly the Minister of Education, who decided to move money away from directed funding to help students in need to block funding on the basis of how many students were in the classroom. Since that day, students are going into the regular classrooms without support, and all of the special ed money that used to be targeted for special education—children who needed the help are not getting it.

Interjection: Gone.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Gone. So in the context of all of these job losses, your strategies have failed. In that context, our leader talked about a number of things—

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I can't hear you—that I think would have been helpful to you in the past, that would still be helpful.

For four, five long years, the leader of the NDP said that we need “an industrial hydro rate so Ontario's manufacturing and resource companies can count on stable competitive hydro policies at a time when many competing jurisdictions have far lower industrial rates.” For four, five long years he said that.

They produce hydro at cheap rates, yet they have to pay inordinate amounts of money to get the hydro they desperately need. They said, “We cannot compete. Even within our own Canadian jurisdictions, we can't compete with Quebec and Manitoba.”

So it was a useful suggestion made by the third party to say to you that we need to—

Mr. Mike Colle: What about Conawapa?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The member from Eglinton—Lawrence—

Mr. Mike Colle: Conawapa—what about that?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: As I was saying—

Mr. Mike Colle: Be fair.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I am trying to be fair. It was a very useful suggestion that he made. They produce cheap hydro. Why should they be paying more for hydro rates than anybody else? They keep people employed in the north, well-paying jobs in the north that are desperately needed so that people don't move away from their hometowns and go to other places like Alberta, but keeping them there. Having an industrial hydro rate would have saved so many of these jobs that I announced that have been lost in the last three years.

Why wouldn't you listen to that? Oh, I see; you had your own plan. What was your plan? Your plan was to lend money to corporations that were crumbling before our eyes. They were saying, “We don't need government money as a loan that we have to pay back. We need an industrial rate that cuts down our rates so we can be competitive. We don't need a loan. We need other measures, such as the industrial rate—lower it so we can be competitive.”

Not once, not one Liberal said, “Yeah, that's a good idea.” Every now and then Liberals say, “Yeah, we've got to work together.” But it seems to me that it's a unilateral kind of working together. It sounds like a soliloquy where we say that we need to work together,

“but it's all about me. It's all about following my Liberal policies and saying at the same time, ‘But we need to work together with Tories and New Democrats. It would really be a great idea.’” It just doesn't work to say, “We need to work together,” and when others make suggestions, you simply turn it away—not good.

We had another suggestion that we made, and that was “a Buy Ontario policy that would ensure that streetcars, subways and buses continue to be made right here in Ontario, resulting in the protection of thousands of good-paying jobs,” and “tougher plant closer legislation”—before I get to that, staying with the issue of a Buy Ontario policy, what's wrong with that? Under New Democratic pressure, the Liberals that had no policy then determine that yes, 20%, 25% would be connected to a measure that says, “We will build here, and it has to be produced here in Ontario”—but under duress and under pressure from New Democrats. We said, “Look, a Buy Ontario policy is no different than a Buy American policy; they do it, and they do it in Europe, and it keeps jobs in your jurisdiction rather than giving them away to other jurisdictions.” It is a modest proposal that Liberals could buy into, and they haven't and I just don't understand why. Then they say that we need to work together. What does it mean to work together? If you reject modest proposals made by other parties that would help our own people in our own province, it means nothing.

1550

They talk about a job training policy that they've got, which only trains a modest number of people. Then, when I brought my resolution forward last week that says, “Let's do what Quebec is doing”—and what's Quebec doing? We often use Quebec as a model for so many things, including the proposal that I brought forward last week, which was that any firm earning over \$1 million should invest 1% of their money in training of their workforce. What could be so wrong with that? If Quebec can do it, since 1996, why can't Ontario? If Quebec can learn from France and Ireland, why can't we learn from Quebec? Yet not one Liberal stood up to support my resolution—and not one Tory, but I understood that and I accept that. Not one friendly lefty Liberal would support my resolution. I know some of you were not here, and if you were here you might have; I understand that. But every Liberal stood up to oppose my resolution, as if somehow there is a training fairy just waiting around the corner to bring the training dollars and the training for all of our workers here in Ontario. There is no training fairy. I said to the Liberals, “I'm not attacking your plan, however modest it is and however inadequate it is.” I was proposing a resolution that would oblige corporations to invest in training. Why? Because they, too, benefit from a workforce that's trained, and it would provide the resources they desperately need to replace their own workers as they age and leave the workforce and have no one to replace them. Not one Liberal stood up to support my resolution, which was a bill—but it's a long story to talk about why it wasn't a bill, but a resolution. I said to the Liberals, “Look, this

measure would help you as a government, it would help the corporations, because then it would prevent one company poaching from another. Companies who train, versus those who don't train and steal the workers of those companies who invest in the training, are poached of their workers, and we don't want that. We don't want one corporation to poach other workers from other companies that have invested. If they all invest, we all benefit from that kind of a plan." But not one Liberal stood up to support me. Where are all the Liberals when you need them? Certainly not around the corner.

Our leader, Howard Hampton, talked about a Manitoba manufacturing and resource tax credit. He speaks of this tax credit as an "investment tax credit that would encourage manufacturers and processors to make capital investments and create jobs. The credit would be 10% of investments in new machinery, buildings and equipment and would be available to all manufacturers and processors making eligible and verifiable investments that result in good-paying jobs. An added incentive of a 20% credit would be available for investments in green industry jobs." It's a plan that's working in Manitoba, and it's a plan that has been rejected time and time again by Liberals.

We have put up a number of suggestions that would help the people of Ontario, and indeed could help the Liberals in power, should they decide to take some of the suggestions and make them theirs. None of these suggestions have been taken up by this Liberal team. They have been rejected each and every time.

What do we have? We have been debating a resolution for the last couple of weeks, and we're going to be debating, it seems, for another week. Why? Because they have nothing else to say.

Your five-point plan is failing Ontario. It's time to reflect on what else you could be doing. It's time to borrow from the third party to get some of your ideas to keep people working.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Hon. Michael Bryant: As ever, I listened intently to the speech of the member for Trinity-Spadina, who not only is an excellent orator but also, in this case, was attempting to bring ideas into the Legislature that the government, I say to the member, could reflect upon, although the member will know, particularly with issues such as private members' business or something that's proposed in, say, question period or by way of NDP resolution or by way of press conference—I know; I've sat on the opposition side. If there is in fact a commitment and a seriousness—and there is, with respect to the member for Trinity-Spadina, there is a seriousness in executing. Let's face it: There are some matters that are opposition strategies, I'll say—I won't say "tactics." And I know—again, I've done that. But then there are other matters: There are resolutions, proposals, bills or ideas for which there is a desire for the particular MPP or caucus to actually bring into effect. That requires, certainly, a level of work by the MPP, to discuss it with

other government members, to discuss it with other opposition members, to discuss it with the people on the executive council who are responsible for this, with a view to trying to get a level of understanding, knowledge and, I dare say, trust around a particular proposal, to avoid a situation where it's a rhetorical "gotcha" proposal—which is not, I understand, what the member was saying.

For some reason, around here, in this legislative chamber, we sometimes treat proposals as if they are once and for all either accepted or rejected, and I don't think that ought to be the case. The member says, "What are we doing here? We need to take"—I obviously completely disagree with him in terms of this characterization of our approach to date and what it has done, and I'll talk about that. But what does the future hold? Well, the purpose of this debate is to hear just that, hear from members, and in particular hear from members who are not sitting around that table, who are not sitting in the executive council, who are bringing back to this Legislature what their constituents are telling them, and stakeholders, the people members work with.

The Minister of Finance highlighted one instance of giving credit where credit was due, to the member for—Mr. Prue.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Beaches—East York.

Hon. Michael Bryant: The member for East York, who brought forward a proposal. I know that the member for Trinity-Spadina might say, "Well, okay, there's one example; it's the exception to the rule." But this House has not operated like a bipartisan congress in the past, which is not to say that that might not be part of its future when it comes to, particularly, these challenging economic times. The proposal to have bills co-authored by an opposition or a third party and a government member was in the spirit of that. I recognize that does not completely address what the member for Trinity-Spadina is saying.

Just to give one example: Buy Ontario. In the province of Ontario, the government has put forward a 25% requirement that there be Canadian content in transit procurement. So we anticipate that will mean upwards of \$15 billion invested on Move 2020 right here in the province. Is there more that could be done in that area? Perhaps yes, and not just in terms of procurement policies, but in other areas; perhaps yes. Perhaps, in addition to encouraging consumers to buy Ontario and Canadian products, there ought to be other specific structural changes, legal changes, whatever it may be.

What we can't do—and I know the member for Trinity-Spadina wasn't advocating this, or I don't think he was advocating this—is do what happened in the interwar period, after the Great Depression in particular, when there was an effort to turn within that came after a period of enormous prosperity. There was a protectionist impulse, there were a lot of populist policies that came forward, and it just didn't work. Historically, every effort by countries to engage in insular policies that are protectionist and avoid international integration has

simply not worked, which is not to say that the idea of complete international integration does not bring with it very important responsibilities for national, provincial and municipal governments to provide services and training to try to level the playing field; recognizing, for instance, that with respect to the trade situation in Ontario, a lot of our export-based economy, yes, does see manufacturing jobs, high-skill jobs, high-knowledge jobs and all those sectors—which I'll get into in a moment—which allow us to be this export-oriented jurisdiction, means that the wealth of other countries is coming into Ontario—that approach, which is treated with great chagrin, as you can imagine, by some people south of the border.

1600

Just within the last couple of weeks, a pretty well-respected editor of Manufacturing and Technology News wrote an editorial that has retained a buzz in referencing, and I'll quote from him: "The real culprit is that fact that almost everything Americans buy is made somewhere else. The country continues to ship all of its wealth overseas.... The core of America's economic problems stem from the trade deficit and the elimination of tens of thousands of factories and millions of jobs that were creating the wealth the country needed to pay for everything."

Well, I agree to the extent that we have to support our manufacturing industry, that it has to be part of our future, but anybody who wants to argue that the manufacturing industry of today is rendering the equivalent of buggy whips and that the future is 100% in the service sector, I just don't agree with that. I do believe that we need to be increasingly trying to create those circumstances and those policies that will see the manufacture of products that Canadians buy. So instead of Canadians buying products that are built in other countries, built in other jurisdictions, we have to try to better be a part of a supply chain that includes more Canadian companies, and that's going to happen worldwide. But to the quote that I provided from Richard McCormack of the Manufacturing and Technology News, south of the border, there is going to be a big push for Buy America, there is going to be a big push for the protection of American jobs and the American manufacturing industry, and there is going to be a big push to address the trade deficit.

I know the member for Trinity-Spadina was not encouraging a whole scale reversion to protectionism, but there has to be a limit because, with our jurisdiction, engaging in a trade war—which is not, I hope, what the member for Trinity-Spadina was advocating—is one that we will lose. It is not one that our jurisdiction can succeed in. We can succeed and have succeeded and will succeed in this international integration, in global capitalism, but obviously there are going to be some significant structural changes internationally with respect to the financial sector, and there is going to be an on-going effort by this province to try and create those circumstances that will attract investment, that will keep

jobs, that will attract new jobs, and that will do those things that everybody agrees will build a labour force that will make this a good jurisdiction to build a business in and to stay in and to work in.

That means a high-quality health care system. It's a major competitive advantage that Ontario has, that Canada has, over many other jurisdictions, in particular the US. In fact, instead of the employers having to, in some cases, spend huge amounts to pay for the health care expenses of their employees, in Canada, this represents a major competitive advantage.

A recent disadvantage is the dollar. Although today was a very low day—it was 85 cents—I think everybody is in agreement that the dollar is likely to be in the 90s for the near future, and the province of Ontario has recognized and needs to build on making those investments that overcome that. How do we do that? We invest in innovation, we invest in business capital—partnerships with business, partnerships with universities—to assist in allowing businesses to improve their productivity by making direct investments in new technologies.

We also do it by way of investing in people and skills training; it has to be done. Within the first few days of my receiving this appointment, I found myself on the floor of a small factory announcing the investments the provincial government had made in the Yves Landry Foundation, which is administering a program that will see on-the-job training for manufacturing workers. As technologies change and the focus of a particular manufacturing business has to shift quickly in order to be competitive, workers have to be able to shift their own skill set on the job. I think we can expect more and more of that in the future.

The major investment, though, is in people, in human capital, in workers and in businesses that are providing the jobs. That is the marketplace. I know that some Conservatives, members of the official opposition, are of the view that those investments are corporate welfare, that those investments are wrong-headed and that we should just let the marketplace do its thing. The problem with that is that the marketplace includes jurisdictions—the United States, in particular—that provide massive subsidies, massive loan programs and massive incentives for companies to come and build in their state or in their country. That is the marketplace. It includes governments having to provide incentives by way of direct subsidy or loan that will amount to a partnership and leverage greater investments from a company that will allow the company to build its product or develop its technology here in Ontario. That's the purpose of the Next Generation of Jobs Fund, that's the purpose of the advanced manufacturing program, that's the purpose of the Ontario Centres for Excellence in terms of encouraging businesses in getting off the ground that is rendering success stories.

Of course, we in government want to talk about the success stories, and not because we are unaware of what is happening out there. We are very aware of what is happening out there, and that is why we have the com-

munity transition program for certain communities. If there is a community that is particularly hard hit and needs some assistance, that's what that program is there for. It recognizes that some municipalities, like Hamilton and Windsor, just to pick a couple, are facing particular challenges, and investments are made in those communities in order to assist them, because they're going through a particularly tough time.

But the success stories are success stories. The \$500-million auto strategy meant that plants landed here in the province of Ontario. Had that not happened, had those investments not been made, then you would not have had the wealth generated in the province that allowed for revenue that was used to build infrastructure, to provide for high-quality health care, to allow for the largest investment in post-secondary education in the province's history and to allow for a massive influx of additional funding for our public education system. We would not have had that revenue but for those investments, nor would we have had those jobs, nor would we have had the increase to the gross domestic product that resulted from that, nor would we have had the experience, the skill sets those workers now have as a result of that.

Obviously we want to remain competitive and attract even more of that sector, and obviously we'll want to retain as many jobs as we can from that sector. But that is not to say in any way that in becoming a global leader in this area this was anything other than a successful strategy. Of course it was. There are jurisdictions around the world that say that that strategy obviously worked. Look at the jobs; look at all the automobiles that were built in this province as a result of that.

1610

It's not just in the manufacturing sector. It's in other sectors: high-tech, life science and clean tech, to name a few. Sanofi Pasteur, a pharmaceuticals company, as a result of an investment by the government will be producing life-saving vaccines at their expanded facility in Toronto. That means more than 900 existing research and manufacturing jobs here in Ontario—900—and creating another 300 construction jobs. 6N Silicon, another example—I raised that this morning at question period—a company producing refined silicon for the solar power industry, is aggressively pursued by jurisdictions in Europe and south of the border.

The leader of the third party was saying, "What about Quebec? Quebec is making investments." Yes, and so is Ontario. Quebec is making investments to try and support the solar power industry and so is Ontario. That's the purpose of the Next Generation of Jobs Fund. I would expect that we're going to see more of the interprovincial coordination, just as you saw with British Columbia and Alberta, as we are putting together with Ontario and the province of Quebec, and hopefully with other provinces as well, as the member makes reference to Manitoba. I was speaking to an individual from the Canadian Manufacturers' Association today from the province of Manitoba, and we were talking about just that: the extent to which we can not only borrow best practices, take

advantage of the best practices that they have learned—for example, in the area of on-the-job training, interestingly, which sees in some cases competitors training their competitors, or future competitors, in part to build the skill set and the labour force. These are all within the future of the province and part of what the government is doing right now with the province of Quebec.

Yes, there's always going to be an element of competition between the provinces, but that doesn't mean we cannot try to work together as a sector or as a region to attract investment and jobs and also potentially harmonize regulations and best practices; to try and take that part of the nation, the provincial-federal divisions, that is a part of our very structure and turn it into an advantage as opposed to one that might make our jurisdiction less than competitive. We are competing with jurisdictions that don't have multiple regulatory regimes, that don't have jurisdictions competing against other jurisdictions. So, yes, we will continue to engage in that healthy competition, at the same time recognizing that we can also work to try and attract businesses together and do the same with the province of Alberta. Minister Papatello began undertaking that work. I look forward to continuing that work with the province of Alberta so that we can become more of a part of the supply chain for industries and businesses in the province of Alberta, so that we are attracting investments and keeping jobs right here in Ontario. That requires partnerships between the provinces.

Each of the provinces has a role to play in this regard. The federal government obviously has a role to play in this regard. Time will not permit me to discuss that. But we on this side of the House will continue to make those investments in human capital, in business capital and in education and health care. There is a different approach on the Conservative side of the floor.

I appreciate what the member for Trinity-Spadina said in terms of a number of initiatives, many of which I absolutely think we ought to be taking a look at, but international integration is going to continue. Doing so with responsible government policies that also serve the people, serve the businesses and create new jobs is the approach of this government today and will continue to be the approach, although we do appreciate and look forward to taking many of the good ideas from this debate and making them part of Ontario's approach in the future.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett: Thank you for the opportunity to address this economic mess that we find ourselves in here in the province of Ontario. I guess there are a number of players we should thank for getting us into this morass. Bill Clinton comes to mind. In 1999, he cancelled the Glass-Steagall Act of 1933. That act was there to save the banks from themselves, to save other financial institutions from themselves. That particular piece of legislation, drawn up during the Depression, prevented these institutions from running up risky debt and creating high-

flying equity and debt trading that we're seeing as they now self-destruct. They now come running to government, particularly in the United States, the UK and in the European Union, for bailouts while handing out generous bonuses and severance packages. Now we see the downside of Clinton economics. Some did achieve short-term gain over the ensuing nine years, and I would suggest that the rest of us are now enduring the long-term pain.

Then there's Dalton McGuinty, who did his best to spend away every single penny of surplus revenue that he taxed in over the past five years—surpluses during the better economic times created by Mike Harris and the Common Sense Revolution. We've been getting the warning signs from the banks. This government has been receiving the warning signs from the opposition for some time now that tough times were coming. Did Premier McGuinty listen? Obviously not. In fact, in the last fiscal year, revenues were \$5 billion higher than even this government thought they would rake in, and they've spent it all—every last penny. So much for saving for a rainy day; so much for John Maynard Keynes or listening to liberal economists like John Kenneth Galbraith. In fact, instead of the restraint that we should have seen during the good times in the last five years, I predict that this government now, now that we are into these tough times, will come up with basically a half-cocked Keynesian-Galbraithian excuse to continue to spend in the spirit of people like David Peterson and Bob Rae.

I really wonder: Has this government learned nothing from the blunders of those two peas in a pod, if you will—the Liberal David Peterson and the born-again Liberal Bob Rae? Are we looking at a further three years of tax-and-spend McGuinty Liberalism, with the predictable deficits as the only response to this present economic turmoil?

Premier McGuinty couldn't balance the books in his first year in office, and that was during good economic times, I'll point out. Who now doesn't expect him to run our finances into the ground? Who would not expect McGuinty to run our finances into the red now, with the all-too-predictable economic cycle that's upon us? Is the McGuinty plan to spend our way out of the coming recession? We saw that a number of years ago. It didn't work.

Question: Does anyone over there have an inkling of what this government will do during the coming economic storm clouds? Does anybody across the way run a business or run a farm, or perhaps have a degree in economics? If anyone does, I would ask you to stand up, because in my view you're presently needed in cabinet.

I really wonder if anyone across the way has an interest in any of this stuff. I posit that it's one thing to have credit cards and expense accounts, to dream up new taxes and suffocating rules, regulations, red tape and forms to fill out, but does anyone running this government have an inkling of how to address the coming tough economic times, how to address the coming—actually, the present—new realities and to steer a course beyond merely taxing and spending?

1620

I don't think a lot of people in my riding made a lot of money in the last few years when the stock market was being artificially revved up with easy money. I do worry that if this government does not get its act together, people in my riding—I think of farmers, truckers, industrial workers, small business people—are all presently about to get kicked in the teeth. I think of the cattlemen, the young farmers in my riding getting into hog production, my tobacco men. People living in Caledonia, people living throughout Haldimand county, are pretty well at the end of their rope. They've already been kicked in the teeth.

I do welcome this debate on the economy, and I point out that we now have a finance minister who recently suggested to the media that the upcoming economic statement will be printed in red ink. Now, that generates more concern about his ability, let alone his willingness, to deal with these economic challenges. Seven months ago this government stressed that to achieve a balanced budget, they would be looking for a billion dollars in savings and efficiencies. Here's the question: Where's the evidence? Where are these savings and efficiencies? And will the books be balanced? As I said, Premier McGuinty could not balance the books in his first year in office. That was during good times. How will we do it now in the coming tough times?

With the present turmoil in the financial markets, people are rightfully worried and they are looking for answers. All we hear from this government is to trust in the five-point plan—the plan, I've heard it in this House, for failure, as I understand—and to await the updated budget numbers they'll have, I think, two days from now.

As Ontarians demonstrate this tremendous anxiety about the state of the economy, we only hear innocuous platitudes from across the way. In recognition of the gravity of this situation, this government should have already presented the economic update. This government should have already presented a detailed plan to address the coming revenue shortfalls and the projected bloated public sector compensation commitments that we've been hearing recently.

With job losses over the last five years—we know of the 230,000 manufacturing jobs—continued high taxes, continued free spending, bigger energy price shocks to come from electricity—we were recently told that that's going up another 10%—and price shocks from natural gas increases, this government has ignored the makings of an economic wreck, and sadly, no one in this government seems ready to acknowledge what is happening.

It wasn't so long ago that Ontario was Canada's economic engine. We've known this for years. We paved the way for prosperity in the country with a very strong economy. Regrettably, the numbers show that we've lost that status. We've now become, and are becoming, a have-not province. Our private sector job creation is the lowest in the country, and our economic growth rate this year is also expected to be at the bottom. And everyone knows about those 230,000 manufacturing jobs that disappeared on Premier McGuinty's watch.

This official opposition has stood in the House and has warned this government of the economic storm clouds—clouds that were on the horizon a few years ago. Now they are upon this province, and we see a province that continues to dither. We've given warnings. Ontario is potentially facing an economic storm, and instead of changing course, the McGuinty crew is headed straight for it as they fiddle with long-standing traditions like the Lord's Prayer, and debating speed limiters on tractor-trailers. There may well be a lot fewer trucks on the road if the brakes continue to be put on the economy with the present provincial policy. As of next year, I remind the House, Ontario will be out of the business of building pickup trucks.

This government motion claims that the higher dollar has prompted them to address the financial crisis. We heard mention recently of the dollar being at 85 cents. Actually, I picked up a reading today, and the Canadian dollar sits at 83 or 83.249 cents, something like that. Why were we not debating the strong dollar last year? Last year at this time, the dollar was not 83 or 84 cents; it was \$1.10. Why was there no motion put forward at that time when we had a very strong dollar? Why was this government not taking note of the economic situation at that time?

Again—and this has been put forward in the House—one theory is that this motion was put forward, very simply, because it was in the middle of an election, a week before the federal election, and in a fairly blatant attempt for this government to assist Dion and his federal Liberal colleagues.

The question is out there: Are the wheels falling off this Ontario economy? Both the Bank of Montreal and the Bank of Nova Scotia, very recently, are predicting a recession, not only in Ontario but across Canada. Ontario's real gross domestic product declined 0.3% in the first quarter of this year, 2008. That's following a mere 0.1% increase in the fourth quarter of 2007. In 2007 Ontario's GDP rose only by 2.2%, down from a growth rate of 2.5% in 2006.

This steady slippage in gross domestic product tells us something. Over the past few quarters, it conveys the ominous signals about Ontario's economic future. For the first time in 30 years, Ontario's unemployment rate exceeded the national average, rising to 6.5% in December last year. Ontario's unemployment rate today remains above the national average, and regrettably it is forecast—this is a forecast by all the major banks—to stay that way right through 2009.

This from the TD Bank: "We anticipate further bad news in Ontario's employment pipeline over the next 18 months, with the jobless rate moving above 7% and personal income growth essentially stalling."

Housing starts: a decline of 27.8% in July, down to just over 59,000 units.

Over the first six months of 2008, Ontario manufacturing sales were 7.5% lower than the same period of 2007. Again, that means lost manufacturing jobs, and we all know that present 230,000 figure: 230,000 jobs lost in our factories in Ontario.

Since October 2003, Ontario has created more public sector jobs than any other province and has the second-lowest rate of private sector job creation. In fact, since October 2003, Ontario created more public sector jobs than all other provinces combined, and nearly four times as many public sector jobs as created in Alberta.

The problem is that government jobs do not create wealth. In that sense, they really can't be considered real jobs from an economic standpoint. They are simply a redistribution of income by taxing private businesses and individuals. Every new public sector job obviously creates an equal demand for taxes from those who are working in the other jobs.

I want to make mention of farming. In less than one year since the last election, October 2007, Ontario has lost 8,500 agricultural jobs. That's a decrease of 9% in farm employment. Thanks to McGuinty, young farmers in hogs, for example, are getting no support at all through any program.

We have also been looking at the past five years of runaway spending. The fiscal policy approach of this government appears to be focused largely on increasing government revenues—they even created a separate ministry for that purpose, which turned out to be not a very good idea; that Ministry of Revenue no longer exists—in order to fund, guess what? Increased government spending. In light of the current economic outlook, this policy approach now looks dangerously risky and economically harmful.

1630

As we all know, in 2004, Premier McGuinty brought in the largest tax increase in the history of Ontario. Government revenues increased—no surprise there. They increased by \$28 billion to the \$97 billion figure today. That's a 41% increase. They increased from \$69 billion in 2002-03—that was the last full year of the Ontario Progressive Conservative government. However, Mr. McGuinty in those five years increased total spending by a whopping \$27 billion. That's a 40% increase—again, up to the \$96 billion level of today. That's up from only, in a sense, comparatively speaking, \$69 billion in 2002-03. So what we have here is five years of knee-jerk liberalism—jack up taxes and then jack up spending by 40%.

To put this in perspective, consider the historical spending of the Ontario government. The NDP government of Bob Rae only managed to increase total spending by 21% in five years. In the eight years of PC government, under both Mike Harris and Ernie Eves, total spending increased by 20%. Only former Liberal Premier David Peterson holds a candle to McGuinty's runaway spending. Premier Peterson at the time increased total spending by a record 45% in five years. So Mr. Peterson still holds the provincial crown for tax-and-spend liberalism.

But instead of using the unprecedented revenue that we've seen come in today and last year and the previous three years to provide tax relief, for example, or to pay down the debt, this present government has used this

money to fuel the traditional year-end spending sprees that we've seen in the last five years—again, robbing taxpayers by shovelling cash out the door as fast as they can.

As this government continues to mortgage against future taxes, total debt in Ontario continues to climb. It now sits at \$168 billion. For every man, woman and child in Ontario, that debt comes in at \$13,125. Don't forget: Add the interest to this debt. That eats up \$9 billion every year, and that's just under \$25 million a day in debt interest repayment.

As my time wraps up, I wish to quote Roger Martin, dean of the Rotman School Of Management. He presented this year to the Standing committee on Finance and Economic Affairs: "In Ontario, we still have one of the highest marginal tax burdens on business investment in the world."

Ontario presently imposes the highest effective tax rate on capital in Canada. Ontario's effective tax rate on capital is higher than the worldwide average, and higher than averages in the United States.

Developments so far this year continue to confirm the separate paths the western provinces have been taking in comparison to Ontario and to manufacturing-heavy central Canada, this according to RBC Economics. Record-high commodity prices and strong global demand for natural resources other than forest products are the benefit. We do have an issue with the Canadian dollar; we've got a weak US economy and high energy prices. We need a plan, and we need a plan from this government quickly.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate? The member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak on this extremely important motion and a very important issue.

I've been very intently listening to the debate that has taken place in this House for the last two weeks. First, I want to thank all the members who have participated in this debate. It is an extremely important issue, and it is important that all of us in this Legislature, on behalf of our constituents, take the time, take the opportunity to share our ideas about the economy not only in Ontario but also in Canada.

Before I get into some ideas, I wanted to highlight the kind of extraordinary times we are living in at the moment, in terms of what's happening globally. This is definitely not the time to engage in partisan rancour and finger-pointing activity. That is not going to serve anybody's purpose in our province.

I don't know about you and other members in the House, but when I'm at home at night, watching the news or reading the newspaper, half of the time, like many of our families in Ontario, I'm trying to make sense of what's going on globally; I mean, it's extraordinary. The details are extremely complex as to what is causing all this economic chaos. The system as we have known it—in fact, major world leaders are meeting to redefine the system, to find the flaws, and try to fix it. That's what our

families are doing when they're sitting at home and trying to figure out what is going on. The last thing they want to see, when they look into this chamber, is a bunch of finger-pointing. They know the problem. People are smart; our families are very smart. They know what the problem is. What they're looking for from us is, they're looking for solutions; they're looking for ideas. That's the job which we have been given on behalf of our constituents: to put our collective minds together—we are very smart people around this room—to come together and come up with ideas, come up with solutions that will create a long-term solution for the changes that are taking place in our economy.

This is not a made-in-Ontario problem. This is definitely not even a made-in-Canada problem. This is a global issue, with far-reaching ramifications. It's up to us to see what we can do here in Ontario to make sure that our families, our constituents and the members of our community continue to prosper. I think it is incumbent upon us to be together in order to do that, as opposed to highlighting the problems and difficulties and, "You did this" and, "We did that" etc., etc. I don't think that really creates the long-term solution we are looking for.

I want to talk about, in particular, one aspect which I think is extremely important and that we need to focus on, and that is building a knowledge-based economy. As the member from Ottawa Centre, with Carleton University and St. Paul University within the riding and with the University of Ottawa next door, and with Silicon Valley North to the west of me, that is something that is extremely important to my constituents, to the city of Ottawa and, I think, across the province: What are we doing as a collective to ensure that we are supporting, producing and encouraging cutting-edge technology, things which others are just thinking about but we are researching, we are commercializing and putting out in the market?

Just this past Friday, I was listening to CBC Radio early in the morning. I heard something which really struck me, and I thought I would mention it here today: Ideas are a renewable resource. That kind of caught my attention, because it's true. Ideas keep coming up, and we never run out of ideas.

If you think further, ideas turn into research and research turns into innovation. In the case of Ontario, innovation turns into the iMac or BlackBerry, and that's just to mention two. There is immense potential in this province for turning ideas into productivity, into products that can create jobs, wealth and prosperity in our society.

As a government, as elected members, we should all encourage all kinds of investment, all kinds of unique ideas to make sure that innovation becomes the cornerstone of our economy, so that we can, to an extent, get away from the ups and downs of the economy, as possible, and to our benefit.

1640

Friday morning, I had the opportunity, with Minister Wilkinson, to announce Ontario research grants under the Ontario research fund, basically investing in our

scientists. We had a few professors from Carleton University, a university from which I very soon will be graduating with my master's degree, investing in their ideas, saying, "This sounds like a great thing. Here's some money so you can work with students, your graduate and undergraduate students, and with your research to turn this idea into something innovative." Right there, that's the kind of investment we need to do, so the next thing we know it's the next generation of BlackBerry or IMAX or whatever technology you might want to refer to.

That's why I'm very excited about the 10-year tax exemption, the Ideas for the Future Act, which we are also debating in this Legislature. Once again, what we are doing is that if you take intellectual property that has been created into an innovative product anywhere in Canada, not just in Ontario—any Canadian university, college or research centre—and commercialize that product right here in Ontario, you will not pay corporate income tax for 10 years. I have had the opportunity to speak with many businesses, with many professors or researchers in the universities in Ottawa, with lawyers who practise in intellectual property law, and again and again I've been told that this is one of those extremely unique, out-of-the-box ideas which the government of Ontario is pursuing; that we need to encourage that kind of tax incentive to spur further innovation in the province. These are the aspects we need to really focus on to ensure that what we're doing is creating a long-term solution to the challenges in the economy.

Yes, we need to focus on short-term issues, because it's extremely important that our families continue to have the jobs they need, to ensure that they're supporting their kids and their parents and grandparents. That is why investment in infrastructure is very important, because it does create short-term jobs. It does help individuals in our communities, in our constituencies and in our homes ensure that they have meaningful jobs. That's why I'm very proud that this government, the McGuinty government, has spent \$9.9 billion in infrastructure this year alone. In my riding of Ottawa Centre, we have seen many, many projects undertaken to renew infrastructure, to ensure that we get away from the infrastructure gap that exists—I mean, we have an infrastructure portfolio which is crumbling, and we need to keep investing in it to make sure there are good roads and sewer systems and a water system available. Also, on the other hand, we are creating the kinds of jobs, short-term jobs, necessary to get away from the economic challenges we are facing across the province.

But I think that a key focus, a key emphasis, should be on long-term solutions. It is, as I said earlier, our responsibility as elected members to create that hope within our communities, to inspire confidence within Ontarians that we are one of the best and the brightest in the world, and their government and their elected members are, together, ensuring that there is a future; that we are working to ensure that we as Ontarians will continue going further and further in our federation, as we call

Canada. That's why I think the emphasis on skills training of individuals and investment in our universities and our colleges is extremely important, and creating apprenticeship programs is extremely important, because we are investing in our future.

To be very honest, this whole debate that is going on is about the pages who are in our Legislature. It's about their future. What we are working toward is to make sure that these kids, who are out here helping us every single day, have a bright future in this province. It's their future we're investing in, and it's up to us incumbents to create confidence in them so that they feel good, so they know that when they grow up, their government has invested in them. That is what we need to do as a province, as an economy, and that's why I'm very proud of the kind of steps that we have taken in our economic stimulus package to ensure that we can get away from this global turmoil that is taking place. I'm confident that we will get through this as a collective in this whole Legislature by working with our communities, by working with our families.

Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak on this important motion.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I appreciate the opportunity to make a few comments and join this debate on the economy, because certainly this is the most important issue that is concerning Ontarians today, as we see worsening economic conditions locally, nationally and internationally.

Frankly, Ontarians get it. Ontarians understand that there are some things that are beyond the control of the Ontario government to deal with. There are things that are happening internationally that are big and that we can't do much about. But they also know that there are some things that can be done that are not being done by this government. The McGuinty Liberals love to tout their five-point economic plan for dealing with the economy, but there's one thing they don't mention—and to my mind this should be front and centre—and that is: Stop spending like there's no tomorrow. That's what this government is famous for, and if you look at the statistics, let's look at 2002-03. In that fiscal year, this government spent \$69 billion, in total, on all programs. What is it today? It's \$97 billion; that's an increase of 40% in spending in those few years. And over those years, have Ontarians received 40% better health care, 40% better infrastructure, 40% better transportation systems? I believe that most Ontarians would say an emphatic no—nothing is 40% better; in fact, it's arguably worse.

To put this into perspective, let's also take a look at some of the spending of other governments. Bob Rae's NDP government increased government spending by 21% in five years, whereas the PC governments over eight years, under Mike Harris and Ernie Eves, increased spending only 20%. But nobody comes close—although the McGuinty Liberals have tried, they still can't beat the

record that was made by David Peterson's Liberals. They managed to increase spending by 45% over five years. So they're the big winners, but the McGuinty Liberals are close behind.

What does this spend-a-thon lead to? That means that, even in years of record revenues, the total debt in Ontario continues to rise, not fall, and it's currently up to \$168 billion. That means that there's over \$13,000 in debt for every man, woman and child living in Ontario. Instead of using the record windfalls in revenue that the government has received over the last few years, instead of using it to pay down debt, which would be the responsible thing to do, this government has been spending money on year-end spending sprees and election promises. That has huge repercussions in terms of the future, because it hampers our ability to spend money on the programs that we really need in Ontario and also to protect ourselves from things that are going on internationally and that are beyond our control. Currently we're spending \$25 million a day on interest repayments; that adds up to over \$9 billion annually. That's a huge amount of money that could be spent on keeping seniors in their homes, spending on employment programs and helping to lift people out of poverty. But instead, no, we're spending money on interest. That's what the ramification is of using the money that you get during those windfall years and not paying down debt. So I would suggest that instead of the five-point plan, the McGuinty Liberals add a sixth point to the plan, which is: Stop runaway spending, if this so-called economic plan is going to have any chance at success.

Looking at the other five points of this economic plan, I would like to comment specifically on two of them because they really resonate within my riding particularly, and one is on the McGuinty Liberals' commitment to making targeted tax cuts. I'd suggest that so far they're missing the mark, if that's what they're looking at, because businesses are leaving this province in droves. We've had many job losses in my riding of Whitby-Oshawa as well, which indicate that this part of the targeted tax cut plan is not working.

1650

Why isn't it working? Because we haven't cut taxes enough. Ontario's corporate taxes are still way too high, despite the federal government's efforts to reduce federal government tax revenues to a 15% corporate tax rate. They've been strongly encouraging the McGuinty government to lower its corporate tax rate to 10% over the next few years, so that we could have a combined 25% corporate tax rate, which would be a huge incentive to international businesses to locate here. Don't listen to us, and don't listen to the feds. Look at what other jurisdictions are doing across the board in other provinces. BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba are not all Conservative governments, but they realize the value of reducing corporate tax rates to incent businesses to do business there.

The capital tax, still widely seen as a huge, significant barrier to investment, was gotten rid of by the federal

government in 2006, some two years ahead of schedule. But here we are still dealing with it in the province of Ontario.

Then there is the granddaddy of all of them, the so-called health tax. As the Canadian Taxpayers Federation has noticed, to date the health tax has taken \$12.2 billion out of the pockets of families, businesses and individuals in Ontario. As Kevin Gaudet, of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, has noted, that's enough to build 12 Rogers Centres, just to put things in perspective. Why can't we be realistic about this? The Premier has said that the health tax is here to stay. Let's face the fact that in the face of our economic situation there should be nothing that's off the table and there should be scrutiny of every program to make sure it's going to provide value for taxpayers' dollars.

One of the great myths of this so-called health tax is that most Ontarians believe that all of this money is actually being used to improve health care in Ontario, when of course we know that's not the case. The money simply goes into general revenue and gets spent on a variety of programs. Yes, some of it is health care, but a lot of it is not. Most people are incredulous when they find that out. They would be happy to pay this money if they were seeing a benefit, if they were seeing an improvement in the health care being delivered across this province. But of course we're not seeing that. Moreover, we're not seeing an equitable allocation of health care resources across this province.

We've heard the Premier saying that we should be seeking fairness for Ontario from the federal government; in fact, it's even included in the body of this motion. Well, what about fairness in Ontario in terms of health care? What about fairness for all parts of this province? I can tell you that for some parts of Ontario, specifically high-growth areas like my riding of Whitby-Oshawa, Durham region and many other areas across the province, including Dufferin county and many other ridings that are represented in this House, there is not the same kind of equitable spending in terms of health care dollars for all communities across the province.

That's not just anecdotal. The Growing Communities Healthcare Alliance, formerly known as the GTA/905 Healthcare Alliance, has done some excellent work documenting the allocation of health care and social service agency funding across the province that clearly demonstrates the large and ever-widening gap between high-growth areas and the provincial average. In 2007-08, there was a gap of \$221 per resident between the provincial average and what some of the high-growth areas were actually receiving for health care dollars. That means that in some parts of Ontario, including my riding of Whitby-Oshawa, they only receive about 76.5% of the health care funding that is received in many other parts of the province. This is true not just for hospital funding but for other types of health care funding and social service agency funding. For my constituents, this means there are many big concerns, one being that many people in my riding can't find a family physician. Many more can't

access essential services like mental health services, because the Rouge Valley Ajax-Pickering Hospital has been forced to close their in-patient mental health beds and move them to Toronto. That means that there isn't local service available for people with high mental health needs. Some people actually have to wait, if you can believe it, a year to get an appointment with a psychiatrist in my area. That is unconscionable and potentially quite dangerous.

In my own riding of Whitby-Oshawa, the actual hospital in Whitby has been physically closed for a over a year and a half because of a fire, which is putting a huge strain on many other parts of our health care system, the other hospitals and service providers, because the Whitby location was the focus for the regional dialysis which other hospitals are now being forced to provide. But this government doesn't seem to be in any hurry whatsoever to reopen it. That, again, is a huge stress on our health care system.

So, certainly the people in my riding are not feeling that they're getting better-quality health care. They know that the gap is ever-widening and it's not being addressed by this government.

In conclusion, I would suggest that this government stop wasting their time braying at the federal government about not getting fairness, and concentrate on providing fairness in Ontario for health care and on really working hard to develop and implement an economic plan that's going to be of benefit to all Ontarians.

I thank you very much for the time.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm delighted to be able to join in on the debate on this motion on the economy by Premier McGuinty.

I think, first of all, we do need to begin by recognizing that our economy is facing serious challenges. We all know that the banking system, the economic system, in the United States has had some extraordinary developments and extraordinary challenges and that that is disrupting international economies. Here in Canada, given that our next-door neighbour is in serious economic trouble, that inevitably will have an impact on our economy, and we recognize that. I must say that we're seeing that play out in my riding of Guelph.

Most people who would be watching here in Ontario know the University of Guelph, but a lot of people aren't necessarily aware that my riding is also a manufacturing town, and the largest component of that manufacturing is, in fact, auto parts. Inevitably, when the big assemblers assemble less cars, they need less auto parts, and unfortunately that has led to some really significant layoffs, particularly in the auto parts sector in Guelph. We really do understand that those folks who have been laid off are going through terrible challenges. Finding jobs to replace those jobs they've lost is a huge challenge for those families that have been laid off in Guelph, and they're facing very, very difficult times, and our hearts really do go out to them.

I'd like to talk a little bit about what we are doing about that. Insofar as the provincial government can have some impact on that, we have been working very hard with our five-point economic plan. I'd like to talk specifically about how that has had an impact on my riding, because while we're seeing negative impacts in my riding because of the economic challenges that we're going through, we're also seeing some really positive things happening in my riding. I think that we need to recognize that while negative things are happening, we also have some very positive things happening, and that those positive things are, in fact, a part of our five-point economic plan. Let me just quickly go over some of those things.

The party down the way here talks about tax cuts, tax cuts, tax cuts, as if that's the only thing you should do, but we understand that tax cuts are one of the things that we must do. We have, in fact, eliminated the capital tax for manufacturers and the resource sector, effective January 2007, which has led to \$190 million in rebates going out to Ontario manufacturers and people in the Ontario resource sector. For other businesses, it has been cut retroactive to 21% and will be phased out for all businesses in Ontario—the capital tax—as we move through the next few years.

1700

One of the things I've heard that really pleases me is that the chamber of commerce in Guelph has said, "That's a move that we needed to have happen. We've been talking in Ontario for years about the need to eliminate the capital tax. It's the McGuinty government that has finally moved on eliminating the capital tax in Ontario and we are very grateful for that."

There's another piece of legislation before the House right now, first announced in the budget, and that's a 10-year income tax exemption for industries which take research from a Canadian research institution and commercialize that. For those industries that do that, those businesses that do that, there will be a 10-year tax exemption. I find that to be a really exciting opportunity for my city. In fact, there's one project going on in Guelph that has the potential for this to be a huge help.

Some of you who have been around this place for many years will recall that under the Conservative government, the jails in Guelph were closed, and the jails were actually one of the major employers. There were huge layoffs in Guelph, or at least loss of jobs in Guelph, related to those closures of the provincial jails in Guelph by the Conservatives. What that has meant is that in Guelph there is land originally used by provincial corrections; also, more recently, some of it has been used by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. That land is now central to the city of Guelph. It's the largest block of unused land, quite frankly, in the centre of the city, adjacent to the University of Guelph.

We've been having a discussion in Guelph about how that land should be used in the future. We have some very exciting proposals on how we can take the strengths that Guelph has—its strengths in food technology, bio-

tech and bioproducts—how we can take those research strengths and develop an industrial centre of excellence in the bioproducts area, in the food technology area. This piece of legislation that is before the House right now will allow us to give a financial incentive to those businesses who want to partner with the fine research capacity we have at the University of Guelph to actually move that research farther into commercialization, because we know that if we are going to move this economy forward, we will not do it simply based on the jobs that used to exist in Ontario. If we are going to revitalize our economy, we have to look at the jobs of tomorrow. And the jobs of tomorrow are jobs based in those areas, those exciting innovation bioproducts areas, and Guelph is situated in a very exciting place to move that forward, so I'm very pleased.

Another thing that we have done is invested very heavily in infrastructure. There's a \$60-billion infrastructure program that relates to hospitals, schools, court-houses, transit and roads and bridges. One of the things about investing in infrastructure when economic times are tough is that it creates jobs, good jobs, in the construction industry. But not only does it create jobs in the short term; what it does is, it leaves us with that economic infrastructure in the long term. Guelph has really been very blessed with a number of investments related to our infrastructure initiatives. For example, we've received money so that Guelph-Wellington Women in Crisis can move into a new, expanded home and provide much better service. That required a capital investment from the province of Ontario to enable them to do that.

Within the last month, I've been present at the opening of two new elementary schools in Guelph. Parts of Guelph are growing, and to serve those growing parts of Guelph, those subdivisions where there haven't been any schools, we have built new schools. It was really a joy to see the enthusiasm of the community coming together around those new community hubs, those new elementary schools that are becoming the focus of their new communities.

One of the things we have never had in Guelph is a residential hospice. We have a very, very good Hospice Wellington association which has provided support for people who are facing the end of life, but we've never actually had a residential hospice. We were able, in last year's budget, to secure the funding to move forward with the province's share of that residential hospice, and that project is ongoing to, again, invest in the public infrastructure in the city of Guelph, but also to provide valuable social services, in this case valuable health support services.

Another really exciting opportunity in terms of health services, one of the things that our government recognized when we looked at health services in the city of Guelph, is an understanding that Guelph is underserved in terms of the number of long-term-care beds. We have been able to provide the funding for 287 new long-term-care beds in Guelph, and that's going forward as a 93-bed wing at the existing St. Joe's long-term care—a 194-bed,

I guess it is, new home. The approvals have just been granted by the city of Guelph to get that sod-turning under way—so 287 new long-term-care beds in Guelph.

Not only does that provide long-term care, but that helps with a problem in our emergency room. One of the big problems in the emergency room in Guelph is that of bed blockers. There are a lot of people waiting in the emergency room for service, and they can't really get the service in the emergency room because it is full of people who should be in the wards, and they can't get a bed in the wards because the people in the wards should really be in a long-term-care home, and it all backs up. So what we're also seeing is that that infrastructure investment has a ripple effect in providing better service at the hospital, not just in the long-term-care homes—another great thing.

We've heard a lot of grumbling from the opposition about how we've been handling the province's debt. In fact, this year there was \$600 million that went to paying down the province's debt, but there was also \$1.1 billion that went into infrastructure in every municipality in the province of Ontario.

Guelph got \$11 million to support infrastructure in the city of Guelph. That's on top of the money we got through the municipal infrastructure program last year, a project that has generated a great deal of interest in Guelph. There is what used to be a convent at the Church of Our Lady. Anybody who knows the city of Guelph—there's a magnificent cathedral, the Church of Our Lady, up on the biggest hill in the centre of town. Adjacent to that is a convent, which has been abandoned for many years. The diocese was facing having to demolish the building; it had no further use for the building. It's a wonderful old limestone building, very significant historically, and the desire of the people in Guelph has been to convert that old convent into a new civic museum. With that infrastructure grant, we were able to get \$5 million to go to that project. That was the money that was needed to make that project move ahead. I've got to tell you, it was a cold blustery day, standing in the parking lot of a cathedral, and we had people there yelling and cheering and crying because they were so pleased that we had finally gotten the money that would let that go ahead. So there are a number of things that have happened that are really important.

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Our gas tax initiative, which has allowed us to take gas tax and invest that in transit, has actually been very important in Guelph. Guelph, traditionally, has had a bus transit route, with very high ridership, but which was designed as daisy petals around the central square in downtown. The money from the gas tax enabled the city of Guelph to be able to fund a new perimeter route around the outside of Guelph. That's what the gas tax money did for Guelph—so, very, very important.

Another one of the things we understand is that if we're going to go and look at those new jobs, people need to be more highly skilled. We've had a major investment in skills all throughout the various levels—in

secondary, in colleges, in universities, with training and apprenticeships. What we're seeing is a payback there. We've got 100,000 more students in universities than when we came in. We've got a large number more that are going into apprenticeships, about 25,000 more already going into apprenticeships. We've changed the high school program so that we get more kids going through to graduation. We've had, because of that, 10,000 kids graduating who probably wouldn't have under the old program.

One of the things we've done is we've introduced the high-skills major into high school, so that there are routes for kids in high school who don't necessarily want to pursue an academic route but who do have talents and certain skill levels, and we're making sure that high school can provide those skills. In Guelph, I've got a couple of really exciting ones. We've got a food and hospitality one. The Minister of Agriculture was there at College Heights just a little while ago, looking at some of the wonderful things with Chef David Racco that we can do with helping students to learn healthy food prep.

We've got another high-skills program at one of my other high schools, Our Lady of Lourdes, which is robotics—so, totally different; a huge variety of these things. They're learning how to design robots. They won an Ontario competition and went on to be finalists at a high school robotics competition down in Michigan. So, again, a huge, huge success there, and wonderful things that we're doing.

We've invested \$1 billion in agriculture. If I can come back to where I started, we understand that it isn't just manufacturing, that there are other opportunities in Ontario. Again, the Minister of Agriculture was in Guelph—you've been in Guelph a lot recently, but that's a good thing—recently to take part in the opening of the Guelph Bioproducts Discovery and Development Centre. We have a Premier's chair of excellence. We're funding the chair, the director of that centre. What we're doing there is providing research that can look at products that come from the agricultural sector or the forestry sector and use them to create products that can be used in the industrial sector, so that you can replace non-renewable plastics with renewable products that give you plastic-like materials. That's going on at the University of Guelph. It's based on the investments we're making in innovation, in research at the University of Guelph, and it's going to provide us with a great opportunity to move forward in the future.

Yes, our economy has challenges. We admit that our economy has challenges. We admit that there are families who are hurting because of the layoffs. But it's also important to understand that we're making the right investments in our economy and that with our five-point plan we will all work together and move our province forward.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'm pleased to join the most important debate in Ontario today, and that is the state of

our provincial economy. At a time when world markets are extremely volatile and when Ontarians are worried about losing their jobs and paying their bills, it is timely and relevant that we are having this emergency debate today.

The challenge, of course, before us is to ensure that this debate is substantive, that the problems we face are taken seriously and that the solutions we each bring forward are considered regardless of which political party they come from. We need to be honest about the circumstances our province and its economy are facing, and we need to work together to bring our province out of a recession.

We have learned in recent weeks that Canada's economy has stronger fundamentals compared to other developed nations, and that our banking sector is the envy of the world. In today's *Ottawa Citizen*, Dennis DesRosiers, founder of DesRosiers Automotive Consultants, pointed out: "Our banks are rated five of the top 20 banks in the world.... We have a strong banking system in Canada and that is going to help us get through this." The same article, written by Vito Pilioci, concludes by pointing out, "Earlier this month, the World Economic Forum stated that Canada has the best financial system in the world, largely thanks to mortgage market laws that have prevented Canadian banks from taking on the same kind of toxic debt that their American counterparts have."

Unfortunately, while the World Economic Forum sees the strength of the entire Canadian economy, the province of Ontario's economy has weakened since the McGuinty Liberals took office. We are now lagging behind other provinces, and we have not been sufficiently sheltered from the economic turmoil faced by our neighbours to the south. I think that's in part because the McGuinty Liberals have not taken seriously until now the economic file. Today, Ontario faces some of the most severe economic circumstances in the country, and the facts before us are troubling for legislators, economists and citizens.

Earlier this year, the Toronto-Dominion Bank reported that Ontario is on track to becoming a province with have-not status, a province that will receive equalization payments. We are set to receive these equalization payments in 2010, when our per capita GDP is projected to fall to 5% below the national average.

We all remember in this chamber when Ontario was the economic engine of this country. Our economy was the strongest in Canada, but sadly, today our fiscal capacity has fallen in four years from \$400 above that fiscal line to just \$84, on average, this year. Ontario's economic growth has slumped from first to worst in Canada. This year, our provincial unemployment rate is now the highest it has ever been in 33 years. It is now higher than that of the national average.

There are serious consequences to these very real problems, and in this chamber we have a very sombre message for Ontarians who could use a little injection of hope at a time when we are confronted, in this province, with massive job losses in the manufacturing sector and

in other sectors right across this province. One must ask: If Canada's fiscal fundamentals remain strong, according to the World Economic Forum, why, then, is Ontario, Canada's largest province, in a recession?

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I fear that the problem is twofold. The first part of the problem is the ignorance, by the present government, on economic policy. I say this with the utmost of concern. When you consider the facts, it is clear that the economic downturn Ontario is facing has been brought on since the McGuinty Liberals took office in 2003. Higher unemployment, a lower per cent of the GDP and straddling the line of have-not status—all since Mr. McGuinty took office. Their economic policies and their lack of interest in the economy in general have led us to this point.

The second part of the problem, of course, is the lack of understanding of the economic crisis which we are in and the absence of any workable solutions by this McGuinty government to the challenges we face. Let me explain the problem in more detail, first in terms of the previous economic policies of this Liberal government and then in terms of what the Liberals are suggesting as proposals to get us out of this recession.

Today in the Legislature, my colleague Tim Hudak of Niagara West—Glanbrook pointed out four of the failed economic policies of this government. The first one: Less than 20% of the funds from the \$500 million in the AMIS program has been distributed to Ontario manufacturers since 2005. If you believe 100% in this initiative, then why are only 20% of the funds being invested?

Less than 18%—this is my second point—of the \$500 million allocated by the McGuinty Liberals for the province's forestry sector has been utilized. This is quite a problem, considering that our forestry industry is one of the most important industries and one of the most important sectors in this province, particularly in the north.

The Next Generation of Jobs Fund, created 200 days ago, has made one funding announcement—that's it—even though the program is supposed to have a turnaround time of 45 days. The question is: What have you been doing with the other 155 days? Absolutely nothing.

According to media reports, only 600 people are currently enrolled in the McGuinty government's Second Career strategy since its creation six months ago. Of course, this is a strategy paid for fully by the government of Canada—thank you, Mr. Stephen Harper, and thank you, Mr. Jim Flaherty.

Most of these failings are a result of the 2008 budget. Since tabling and then passing the 2008 Liberal budget, our economic outlook has significantly worsened. The Liberals left no room to manoeuvre. For example, since the budget was passed this past spring, the price of a barrel of oil has increased by 35%. Their budget projected a balanced budget in 2008-09 and 2009-10 after deducting contingency reserves, and our GDP is now poised to come in about 0.5% under its plan. That will cost Ontario taxpayers about \$500 million. All this, in the face of major economic indicators that should have told the McGuinty Liberals to slow down, halt the spending,

reduce taxes and get a hold on inflating their bureaucracy. Finally, after their failed policy is an international economic crisis, the Liberals have decided to join the debate. So I'd like to welcome the Liberals to finally debate this with the Conservative Party, and I hope that they will take some advice from us in the Progressive Conservative Party.

This, of course, brings me now to the Liberals' five-point plan and their desire to convince us that their solution is the right one for this economic crisis. So I'll discuss it, but I will not support it. Let's run down the five-point plan, and I'll add my thoughts as I read through them.

Investing in skills and knowledge: This point is actually code for, "Thank you, Steven Harper, for funding our Second Career strategy with your \$357 million in federal skills training."

Their second point, investing in infrastructure for a stronger Ontario, really means, "Municipalities, we promised you this money when we thought we had a surplus. But since we might be in deficit financing this year, do you think you can spare some change?"

Lowering business costs is their third point. This is code for, "We raised the cost of business, and everyone knows it. But we're really, really sorry."

Fourth, strengthening the environment for innovation, is code for, "As we have seen in the money we handed over to Dell, this is not really about saving or creating jobs; it's about employing people long enough to print pink slips." This is actually not funny. Maybe it's a funny little line, but it's not funny. I think we actually had one of our Liberal colleagues say, "We're creating short-term jobs." What is the point? Fix the economy. Do what we need to do to get on with this.

Anyway, I'll go back to their fifth point: Forming key partnerships to strengthen Ontario. The first partner I can think of is the federal government. But after continually picking fights with the Prime Minister, his finance minister and his housing minister—I'm surprised that they haven't picked a fight yet with the Minister of National Defence and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, but that's coming. The new government hasn't even sworn in its cabinet, but I'm sure they'll find a way to pick another fight.

These are challenging times, and Ontarians expect us to work together. They require strong leadership, and they deserve it. Today's resolution and debate would be far more meaningful had the government entered our discussions by working with the opposition, in terms of briefing us on the state of their books, providing us with the opportunity to work on the solution together and, of course, ensuring that this debate is relevant.

This week, the finance minister will deliver his finance statement, and this is what I hope is included in it, because this will be good for the folks in Nepean—Carleton but it will be great for people right across Ontario.

I hope they have a plan to bring the three party leaders together to work out and implement a plan for Ontario—not a partisan plan but a productive plan.

Restraint: Kevin Gaudet of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation said that program spending by the Liberal government has increased by 30%, limiting the ability of the government to offer tax relief to Ontario families. I hope that many people, regardless of political party, joined their federal counterparts in the last month. What was really important was we all had the opportunity to go door to door and talk to the people we represent here. In some cases, we might even have gone to a place that another one of us represents. In any case, I can tell you that what I heard time and again at the doorstep is that people are finding it's tough, with higher food prices, higher gas prices, higher utility prices. Some people are losing their jobs. They can't afford big government spending anymore. They need some relief at home. That's what that government should be looking at providing.

They should be cutting business taxes. Roger Martin, who heads their Ontario Task Force on Competitiveness, Productivity and Economic Progress, has been calling for lower business taxes. He reports to the Liberals. He's been telling them for years to cut business taxes. I hope they actually start to listen to Roger Martin on Wednesday.

Reduce regulatory burdens: Catherine Swift, of the CFIB, tells us that senseless regulations are costing Ontario businesses \$13 billion a year. That's an awful lot of money. That's enough money to put toward new machinery, investments, innovation, hiring new employees, priming the pump, so that we can actually get more people working in this province; a province, I might add, that while Canada's stature in the world is rising because of our sound banking system and the strength of our economy, its largest province is afflicted with a slowing economy.

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So these are four simple points. The first one, I think, is achievable as early as today. The others are what Ontario business people are calling for to bring Ontario out of a recession created and abetted and fostered by this McGuinty Liberal government. These are not pie-in-the-sky ideas, and they don't rely on federal money, partnerships that the Liberals don't want, surpluses the Liberals don't expect, programs that don't work and problems that the Liberals created.

As I mentioned, I think this is a very important debate. In our caucus, we have been discussing for as long as I've been elected, which was 2006, the challenges that the economy is going to face. I'm really pleased that the McGuinty Liberals have decided to engage in this debate. It wasn't very long ago—in April, in fact—that I spoke to their 2008 budget, where at the time I remember my colleague, our finance critic Tim Hudak, warning the Liberals that we were going into a recession. He warned them that we were going to be receiving equalization benefits. He warned them that our percentage of the GDP was dropping. They did nothing. Their budget in 2008 was quite unremarkable, with the exception that it raised and increased spending. Ontarians can't afford much more of their spending. Ontarians need relief, and I

would urge the finance minister this week, when he delivers his economic statement to Ontarians in this Legislature, that he think about real measures that will make a real difference to people whom we represent.

You know, the real challenge that the Liberals face is that they've stuck themselves into a rigid ideology. From time to time in this chamber we'll talk about tax cuts, and they'll hiss and they'll boo and they'll pull their hair out, but the reality is, tax cuts are happening right across this country, and they're happening whether it's a provincial Conservative government, a provincial Liberal government or a provincial New Democrat government, because it's the right thing to do in challenging times.

So you folks opposite have a big job to do. You will not be judged by your massive health care premium. You will not be judged by broken promises. You will not be judged by cuts to farmers and agriculture. You will not be judged on anything else. You know what you will be judged on in three years? On how you handled this economy. You will be judged on the number of people you put out of work because of the fiscal policies that you have adopted and employed. That's what you will be judged on, and that's why it's extremely important—as much as you want to heckle and jeer—to take this very seriously. This is an economic crisis. It is happening in other parts of the world, but we know from the World Economic Forum that Canada is well placed to weather the storm. It is your job to make sure Ontario is well placed to weather the storm.

So I'm going to conclude now, but I think it's extremely important, during these times that are very confusing to people who have retirement savings, to young families who have purchased their first home, that we take this role in this chamber very seriously and remember that what we do in this chamber and what we pass on as law and the plans that we put in place impact real people.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I wish everyone good luck, and I look forward to hearing how the finance minister and Mr. McGuinty are going to solve this provincial economic crisis.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I am delighted to have the opportunity, as a rigid ideologue, to put a few of my views on the record this afternoon. I apologize to the good folks in Peterborough riding for being a rigid ideologue when I get a chance to chat today about what we're doing.

First of all I want to talk about some good news. Just last Friday I had the opportunity to be in the municipality of Havelock Belmont Methuen, indeed in the village of Havelock, to announce—through the good work of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Affairs for the province of Ontario, her parliamentary assistant my colleague the member from Northumberland—Quinte West, and indeed on behalf of the Premier of this province—a \$5-million investment from the Ontario Ethanol Growth Fund for Kawartha Ethanol Inc.

What's interesting is just to see the enthusiasm of that farm co-op—the members of that farm co-op that have

made that important project a reality. They were enthusiastic about investing in Ontario, not the Herbert Hoover—R.B. Bennett approach that we're hearing across the aisle. I don't want to quote the very distinguished federal finance minister who talked about investing in Ontario, but I met 25 individuals at Havelock last Friday who were prepared to make a solid investment in the future of Ontario, a solid investment in Peterborough riding and a solid investment in the municipality of Havelock Belmont Methuen which will create 45 new jobs. We're looking forward to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and her parliamentary assistant, and indeed if the Premier is available, in March 2009 to open up this state-of-the-art ethanol facility in Havelock, Ontario, which is going to be a closed-loop system. All of the by-products that will be used will be putting electricity back into the Ontario grid—a real success story in the riding of Peterborough. But it doesn't just stop there.

We talk about manufacturing. Of course, one of the largest plants that GE has in Canada is located in Peterborough, Ontario. We currently employ about 1,200 employees on that site. It is the headquarters of GE nuclear products. I just want to read verbatim from an ad that appeared in the Peterborough Examiner on October 4, 2008: talk about confidence in Ontario and Canada:

"GE" energy "Motors Division, Peterborough, large motors and generators, manufactures engineered-to-order AC and DC motors for a variety of industrial applications, including petrochemical production, mining, steel mills and air separation. Motors up to 65,000 HP and generators up to 32,000 kw have been designed and built on this site. We are a world leader in providing high-value, custom, large-motor solutions leveraging premier technology and quality. This is a Canadian ... design and manufacturing facility with a global product mandate. We offer a competitive salary and benefits package, and the professional advantages of environment that supports your development and recognizes your achievements. Located an hour's drive northeast of Toronto in the beautiful Kawartha Lakes region, Peterborough boasts an extraordinary quality of life, outstanding educational facilities (Trent University and Fleming College)"—thanks to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, that's made many investments in both Trent and Fleming—"and a new, 500-bed regional health centre" that just opened its doors on May 9. Thanks to the revenue that's generated by the health benefit in the province of Ontario, the government of Ontario was able to put \$200 million into that new facility. "A vibrant arts and cultural community, exceptional sports facilities and programs for all ages, and an expanding regional retail/commercial base make Peterborough a special place to work, live and call home."

It is interesting: This ad in manufacturing is the largest recruitment initiative of GE Peterborough since the mid-1970s. Whom are we looking for? We're looking for quality specialists, supervisors, engineers, project managers, electrical systems and control engineers, mechanical/electrical technicians and technologists,

mechanical/electrical engineers, and we're also looking for fitter-welders, millwrights and industrial electricians. Indeed, beyond that we're creating junior and management positions to supervise all of these people. This is one of the great success stories in manufacturing in the province of Ontario.

Again, you hear the doom-and-gloom, R.B. Bennett—Herbert Hoover approach that we hear from across the aisle.

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Interjection.

Mr. Jeff Leal: My good friend from Eglinton—Lawrence talks about the Bush—McCain—Palin view of the world.

So, there's a lot of great optimism out there, if you just take the opportunity to consider it.

This afternoon, I did get a little concerned when the member from Dufferin—Caledon was talking about a number of municipal issues. Many of us who had the great privilege, members on this side of the House—indeed, I'll go back to that famous AMO meeting in 1997. The then Premier of the day came in with his large entourage of 25 or 30 people, with all the big, fancy backdrops, to announce the revenue-neutral Who Does What plan. I remember that we were all in Ottawa and we were there to listen to the Premier's speech. A few of us were standing in the back of the room that day at the Who Does What panel—you were in municipal politics; you might have been there at that meeting, Madam Speaker. A number of us thought for a moment, and we did a quick analysis of what the Who Does What ramifications would be for municipal governments in the province of Ontario. Well, it wasn't too long after that that we got the opportunity, when we came back to Peterborough—we had our great finance staff of the city of Peterborough. Their director is still there, my good friend Brian Horton. That's when I nicknamed the Who Does What panel as the "Who Got Done in" committee. That evening at Peterborough city council, I said that when you did the calculations, municipalities were going to get done in, and that's exactly what happened.

When that government had the privilege of being government, they just about destroyed municipal government in the province of Ontario. In fact, they were given advice not to do some of those things. The very distinguished David Crombie, a well-known mayor here in Toronto and a former federal cabinet minister, was charged with the responsibility to provide them with some advice about what should be handled at the municipal level and what should be handled at the provincial level. One of the things that David Crombie recommended that they didn't pay any attention to, because I guess they thought he didn't know much about municipal government, was that you can't off-load some of those social programs onto the property taxpayer—social housing and some of the social welfare costs. They just dumped that on the municipalities. In fact, many of the municipalities really got done in through that exercise.

I'm very proud to be part of the government, over the last five years that we've had the privilege of governing,

that has started to upload some of those responsibilities. We've uploaded the cost of public health to a 75%-25% basis. We've uploaded the costs as a partner in housing. We're taking back the ODSP benefit costs and drug costs on a very progressive basis. We look forward to when the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing announce the further evolution of how the province of Ontario will take some of those costs that are income-redistributive in nature back to the provincial level where they belong and have the property tax look after those items that were always identified to be supported by property tax.

Again, the member from Dufferin-Caledon talked about assessment in the province of Ontario. Well, that's a good one. Who brought current value assessment into the province of Ontario?

Interjection: Who?

Mr. Jeff Leal: It was the Conservative government. And to make matters worse, they off-loaded 90% of the assessment costs, an impact that was picked up by municipalities in the province of Ontario before assessment was a function of the Ministry of Finance.

I'd be the first one to admit that that system needed to be reformed. We had the situation here in Toronto where some properties in Rosedale hadn't been reassessed since 1925, and out in what was then the city of Scarborough, they were using a 1975 assessment base. All of us in this chamber recognize that there were some inequities in assessment that needed to be corrected. But we had MPAC brought in—again, municipalities picked up 90% of the cost. Many of the assessors who were working in the Ministry of Finance took early retirement because they didn't want to have any part of MPAC, so we lost all that institutional knowledge that, I think, put fair values on properties in the province of Ontario.

Thank goodness, from our side, the Ombudsman came in with about 50 or so recommendations to reform MPAC, and being the responsible group that we are, we brought those 50 recommendations in. The new assessment notices will be brought out. Any decreases in assessment will go down automatically and any increases will be phased in over four years.

We've brought in a high degree of transparency. I remember as a city councillor going and representing some of my constituents to appeals where the onus was on the individual to prove that MPAC was wrong. Through the work of the Ombudsman and the reforms that we've brought in, now the onus will be on MPAC to prove the value of that property. So for them, our friends across the aisle, to talk about what's happening at the municipal level of government truly is shameful for what their record—I mean, downloading all those services, virtually killing municipal government in the province of Ontario. To hear some of their speeches now about municipal government leaves a lot to be desired.

I want to talk a little bit about our five-point plan. There's no question Ontario is certainly facing some real economic challenges, but it's interesting to note, in June of this year, Tom Courchene—whom we'd all recognize in this chamber as one of Canada's leading economists,

headquartered at Queen's University—wrote a paper, and he said: "Let's cut some of the myths that are being perpetuated here in Ontario." In fact, from 1977 to 1982, under the leadership of one of Ontario's most distinguished Premiers, Mr. Davis—who, of course, during his 14 years as Premier had 14 straight deficits—Ontario, as Tom Courchene points out, technically qualified for equalization. Why did that happen in that five-year period? It was because there was a rapid escalation in energy costs. It was the first big wave of the price of oil going up internationally.

When you look at equalization and the formula, some people say it's complicated. It's not really all that complicated because when it comes to equalization, you add up your fiscal revenue base in any given province. So any time there's a huge escalation in energy costs, particularly for those provinces that have the resources, your equalization formula is going to be thrown out of whack, because the Premiers from those provinces have always argued that because of the finite nature of natural resources, all the revenue shouldn't be calculated on a full-value basis—which was always very interesting to me, because if we take a kilogram of iron ore out of Sudbury or take gold out of Timmins, that's always been calculated in Ontario's economic base on a full-cost basis.

So the real issue is, when we have rapid increases in oil and natural gas, it throws the equalization formula on its head. A province like Ontario, because of that and the increased fiscal capacity brought about by rapid changes in energy prices, would technically be put in a position to be a have-not province. What happened between 1977 and 1982? They rewrote the equalization formula so that Ontario wouldn't receive it, because of its historical nature, as the late John Robarts used to say, as the linchpin of Canada's Confederation.

So indeed, I think these things need to be pointed out because we have an interesting rewriting of history from across the aisle on many of these key issues that I think need to be addressed. I do have some time to take the opportunity to talk about the five-point plan.

The other thing I'd like to say is, when I'm chatting with the mayor of Peterborough, my good friend Paul Ayotte, and the warden of Peterborough county, my good friend Ron Gerow, they're very impressed by how we've made a lot of strategic investments. I know, for example, through the distribution of the surplus of the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, that the city of Peterborough gets about \$7 million to invest in priorities in Peterborough. They haven't seen such a cash flow in many, many years. They were starved to death for those eight long years during the Harris-Eves administration, as the infrastructure crumbled in the city of Peterborough.

Let me tell you, when October 2003 came, for many of the municipalities, including mine, it was certainly a new day, that there would be the establishment and the nurturing of a new partnership between the province of Ontario and municipalities across the province of Ontario.

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I know that the county of Peterborough got \$2 million from the fiscal surplus. That will allow them to start rebuilding bridges and roads, the kind of things they need to do. But when you put that on top of the MIII initiative that we've brought in, there's renewed hope in our municipalities, a great sense of optimism. I don't know about other ridings, but when you're in Peterborough right now, you can't move for graders, dump trucks, building this, doing this—a great sense of optimism.

I just talked about GE and what they're doing and the investments in Kawartha Ethanol Inc. The good news is out there. We can dwell on and on and on like the R. B. Bennett–Herbert Hoover/McCain–Palin–Bush approach, but you've got to be optimistic out there.

When we start talking about some of our investments, I look at the agri-food sector, which is so very important to the 40% part of the Peterborough riding that's rural. I look at \$1 billion to help farmers and support our ethanol program. I mentioned what we're doing in Peterborough. We have the new risk management program, designed by our government, certainly helping out the grains and oilseeds sector. We have \$150 million for the cattle, hog and horticulture sector.

We're providing some targeted tax cuts and more spending on training and retraining. We've initiated about \$3 billion in targeted tax cuts for businesses that our friends across the aisle voted against.

On the training program, they voted against the \$1.5-billion skills-to-jobs action plan, including the Second Career strategy to retain 20,000 workers.

There are a couple of other things I just want to highlight here. It's really interesting, because each and every day we hear from the opposition, we get the "spend" questions asking us to provide more of this and more of that.

Let's talk about nurses, for example. During the Harris era, there were 8,000 nurses in the province of Ontario who got their pink slips, and indeed the Premier of the day actually equated nurses to being as obsolete as hula-hoops. Remember when he made that statement? Now they want us to go back to the old days of giving nurses a pink slip.

Let me tell you, the Minister of Community and Social Services just came in here, and one of the reasons that she got into municipal politics is that she was a very distinguished Ottawa city councillor, but beyond that she was a nurse, and she was able to witness right up front those 8,000 nurses, many of them from the Ottawa area, who got their pink slips. She wanted to come to Queen's Park to right that ship. One of the ways we did it was that we brought in—controversial at the time—the health care premium. But we've been able to use those dollars from the health care premium, as I said, to build a brand new, state-of-the-art hospital in Peterborough, and for five family health teams that have reduced the wait list for access to primary care by 10,000 people. We've put more nurses and front-line care workers into our long-term-care homes. I frankly admit that more has to be done.

These are just the fruits of our investments in Peterborough and all the good things that we're doing.

It's rather interesting. One of my friends across the aisle asked a question today about putting a new MRI in her community in Lindsay, Ontario. Well, when they stand up and ask those questions, do they think we're paying for this with Canadian Tire money? It takes fiscal resources to make those kinds of investments. So we have this really interesting contradiction. One day, they stand up and say "Cut, cut, cut," and by Wednesday it's, "Spend, spend, spend." I think they've got to get a consistent message out there.

You look at their campaign platform from a year ago. I know that faith-based schools was a centerpiece, but when you look at some of their other initiatives, there were a lot of "spend" items in that platform. And I know my friend from Glanbrook—what is it, Tim?

Interjection.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Oh, I'm out of time. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I have five minutes. I enjoyed my friend from Peterborough's comments, although his recollection of history reminds me of Joe Biden's recollection of history when he said that, when the stock market crashed in 1929, FDR went on television to calm the nation. You remember that one? Television was not available to families across the United States, or North America, at that point in time, and, secondly, FDR was not even President at that point in time. So my friend has a very similar recollection to Joe Biden's.

My time is limited, so let me say this: I really hope that when the Finance Minister stands in his place on Wednesday afternoon of this week to read the economic statement, which is a sort of halfway-through-the-fiscal-year update, he will not announce that the McGuinty government will be running a deficit in 2008-09. I really hope that's not the case, because all that means is that he is loading up future generations to repay that fund, plus interest, putting another burden on our children and grandchildren. The McGuinty government has already run up the provincial debt to record levels because of their reckless spending.

Why do I say that? Well, do you know what? Revenues to the Dalton McGuinty government are up a phenomenal \$19 billion because of your tax increase on the backs of working families and seniors, because of increased transfers—quite frankly, generously from the federal Conservative government's additional funds that have come in from non-tax revenues—some \$19 billion more revenue coming. Let's put that in perspective: The entire budget of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador is \$6.4 billion. The entire budget of the province of Nova Scotia is \$7.1 billion. I'll bet if you throw in New Brunswick there, those three Maritime provinces combined would not have a budget of the \$19 billion of increased revenue that has come in to the Dalton McGuinty government. So why I'd be flabbergasted, with that much more money coming in, that

Dwight Duncan would open the floodgates and spend all of that money for the McGuinty government so they'd be running a deficit in 2008-09. Frankly, it is incomprehensible.

What did they do? How did they generate those funds? Well, the result is, while in the short term they may have increased revenue, they have done some significant medium- and long-term damage to our economy. Their big moves, once they became government, were to increase the tax on the backs of seniors and working families and to raise the tax on new business investment in the province of Ontario to the highest in all of North America. The result: Over 200,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs have now fled our province under Dalton McGuinty, many of those in our area, in Hamilton and Niagara. And what is the experience of the seniors in our province and our young families trying to make ends meet? They're facing higher taxes. They are facing higher prices when they go and fill up their grocery cart at their grocery store. This winter they'll be finding higher prices when they're trying to heat their homes. Energy prices, it was just announced, are going to increase one more time. All the while, they're seeing a liquidity crisis, the value of their savings and their RRSPs drying up, and the cost of borrowing potentially

increasing as well and, this past month, receiving skyrocketing property assessments in their mailboxes, courtesy of Dalton McGuinty's new assessment scheme that's going to raise taxes on homeowners across our province.

So I do hope that the Finance Minister in a couple of days' time will rise in this House and actually have a plan to reduce the tax and regulatory burden, to help create new jobs in the province of Ontario and restore Ontario to its rightful place as a leader in Canada in growth and job creation. Secondly, I do hope—there are record revenues coming into the Treasury—that Dalton McGuinty hasn't wasted this incredible opportunity by spending it all without setting any kinds of priorities and by announcing a deficit on Wednesday. That would truly be a horrible circumstance for Ontarians and a very difficult burden on families in the future.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The time for debate has expired.

It is now 6 p.m., so I declare this House adjourned until October 21, at 9:00 a.m.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The House adjourned at 1759.

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		Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
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Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
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Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa-Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
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Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East-Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est-Stoney Creek	
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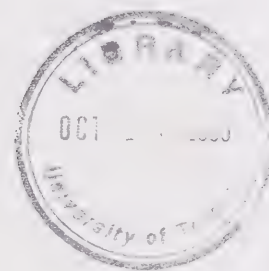
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Tuesday 21 October 2008

Mardi 21 octobre 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 21 October 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 21 octobre 2008

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the non-denominational prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 20, 2008, on the amendment to the amendment to the motion by Mr. McGuinty to acknowledge the economic challenges facing the province and continuing to implement an economic plan.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. Bill Mauro: Thank you, Speaker. I look forward to the opportunity to share a few comments with you this morning and the House on our motion, and I want to thank the Premier for bringing it forward. I think it provides a great opportunity for all members of all three parties to put on the record their thoughts and feelings as we face these economically uncertain times in Ontario—certainly more acutely recently, but something that most of us have felt was coming for some time.

While I do believe that it has provided some fertile ground for the opposition and an opportunity for them to sort of slag what has been going on around here for the past number of years, I believe it has been a very important thing that the Premier provide all of us in this Legislature with an opportunity to discuss these things.

What it's also going to do is provide an opportunity for the people of the province to compare and contrast the different ways in which the different parties handle situations like this. Without going too far back in history, we know that in the period of 1990 to 1995, we had what is today the third party in power—during which there were some difficult times, we acknowledge, in Ontario—and we saw the reaction and the way that particular period of time in the province was managed. We saw the results: a \$55-billion debt left to the people of the province in that five-year window, and we saw some of the reaction and the policies that were put in place to try and deal with that, one of which I remember very clearly: a program put in place to help northerners, the northern Ontario heritage fund, which had \$60 million in it, and the NDP took that \$60 million out of that fund and put it into general revenues in that five-year period of time. They raised hydro rates by 40%, they raised the gas tax—

they did a number of things during that period of time. That was some of their reaction to what were some difficult circumstances. And, of course, we find ourselves now, as the Liberals, governing during difficult times as well. We will see at the end of our mandate how that compares to what happened while the NDP were in power.

The Conservatives very recently, from 1995 to 2003, also had an opportunity to govern, and this is why I began my comments by saying that the people in the province will have an opportunity to compare and contrast. From 1995 to 2003, I think most people would agree, the American economy was quite robust. As an export-driven economy primarily in the province of Ontario, we were able to follow along and have some very strong, very good economic times during that eight-year window. Still, in a situation like that, where we were following along a strong American economy and doing very well, we saw what I believe is probably the biggest tax shift in the history of the province of Ontario when the Conservative government of the day decided to download an incredible amount of responsibility and financial responsibility onto the backs of municipal property residential taxpayers.

Mr. Jeff Leal: That was the “who got done in” committee.

Mr. Bill Mauro: That was the “who got done in” committee. I was a member of a municipal council at that time, as I know many other members of this Legislature were, and had to try and find that capacity within their limited resources as municipal councillors. I think that eight-year period was the reason why a lot of people with municipal council experience decided that they were going to run at the provincial level. Even though we had a strong economy, that particular party felt the need to shift tax responsibility onto the residential property taxpayer. They felt the need still to sell public assets. We know the example of—is it Highway 407? A \$3-billion revenue stream to the government—an asset that was valued at \$8 billion or \$12 billion, as I understand it. These were some of the things that they felt they needed to do, even though there were strong economic times. At the end of the day, in those circumstances, we still found ourselves in the province of Ontario left with a deficit during strong economic times—a deficit that they said did not exist—going into the election of 2003. Right up until two or three days before October 2003, there was still a constant, consistent message coming from that party—the official opposition today—that there was no deficit. Well, we had that validated within six months

after October 2003, whereby the Provincial Auditor came in and confirmed that in fact there was a deficit.

Let me begin a bit by acknowledging that we all are aware obviously that there has been job loss in the province of Ontario. My community of Thunder Bay, my riding of Thunder Bay—Atikokan, has not been immune to this. Specifically affected has been the forestry industry. That's common knowledge, as has been the auto sector and other manufacturing-based sectors in the province of Ontario—very hard hit. Many of those people affected in those industries who have lost their jobs are people that I've known my entire life. Many of them are my demographic—people that I went through school with; people that I've known for a very long time, whose kids played with my kids. This very much hits home. We know these people. We don't need anyone reminding us about the very difficult times that individuals and families have found themselves in. I guess the point is, what have we done in reaction to that as to compared to what other parties have done when they had an opportunity to respond?

There was a program on last night that I watched, the Paikin program; he was broadcasting from Windsor. One of the things that they were talking about there was the manufacturing job losses in the province of Ontario, but they were also talking about small and medium-sized businesses. I think the number they used last night was somewhere in the magnitude of about 3,000 fewer small businesses now than there were four or five years ago. While it is the individuals who work in these manufacturing plants who are affected, we also understand that small and medium-sized businesses have been similarly affected. I know a little bit about that; I have the greatest amount of respect possible for small private business owners. My parents, Jim and Doreen Mauro, opened up a small family business. The family home was attached to the business. For nine years my parents worked that business for 365 days a year, 14½ hours a day—non-stop, nine years, full-bore; no paid pension, no sick days and no paid holidays. So I have a great amount of respect for small business owners and for private businesses, and we all understand and know the challenges that they are facing as well.

What I want to talk a little bit about today, though, within my riding is some of the reaction that we've had and how we've been able to help while there's been losses in the forestry side all across Ontario. Quite frankly, to be clear, even though the NDP have spent the last five years trying to pretend and blame our government for what's gone on in forestry, most people understand that this is a situation that exists in BC and Quebec and every province that is large in manufacturing on the forestry side. Everybody knows that these losses have occurred in all of these provinces, and in the United States as well, for a variety of reasons, but it's only the NDP who disingenuously try to suggest that it's only happening in Ontario and that it's disproportionately happening in Ontario. I must say, I would almost thank the Conservatives a little bit; their language when it comes to

commenting on forestry is much more genuine than I would suggest the third party's—not the entire third party. To be fair to the third party, I don't even think it is—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'd just like to caution the member on the language that he's using with respect to the remarks that he's attributing to the New Democrats. I'll return to the member.

0910

Mr. Bill Mauro: “Disingenuous” and “genuine.” I don't think there's—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would ask the member to withdraw the statement now.

Mr. Bill Mauro: I withdraw, Speaker.

What I was going to try and say was that I don't even think it's the entire third party, but I think it's primarily the leader of the third party who focuses on this particular stream of thought and who spends a lot of his time trying to indicate to people in my riding and people all across Ontario that when it comes to forestry, this party, our government, is primarily responsible for what has gone on in this industry. Of course, that's absolutely ridiculous. Anybody who's paying attention to this issue at all, when they compare to Quebec—and we saw for a long time the leader of the third party spend all of his time comparing Ontario to Quebec. You know what? He doesn't do that anymore. He stopped comparing Ontario to Quebec. He was trying to blame energy costs as the only thing that was affecting this industry and that's why all the job losses were occurring, but he doesn't compare to Quebec anymore, because Quebec has lost more jobs in the forest industry than Ontario has. While they're blessed topographically and have an abundance of hydro-electric power, which is cheaper, and they don't have to rely on nuclear or other forms of energy like we do in Ontario, still, even in that circumstance, they find themselves with more job losses in the forest industry.

So we know that that's not the case, and we know that BC is experiencing similar job losses. We know that there used to be something like 150 paper mills, at one time, and now we're down to about 50. Well, guess what? All of those didn't close in Ontario. They're closing everywhere. There's a series of variables that are affecting this industry.

In my riding in the last five years, there have been about 1,600 jobs created in a new knowledge-based sector. These jobs have gone a long way to mitigating some of the losses in the forestry industry in terms of helping a community to stay viable. We've seen great increases in employment at the university; we've seen great increases in employment at the college; at Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre, at the hospital; at the Northern Ontario School of Medicine; with the hiring of more teachers.

These are good-paying jobs. Whenever we make an announcement about a job that's been created, somebody always wants to try and put a negative spin on it and say, “Well it's all about service sector jobs; the jobs that are being lost are good-paying forestry jobs.” And we ac-

knowledge that there has been a lot of that, but there have been a lot of well-paying, full-time—salaried, with benefits—jobs created in our province. If you talk to real estate agents in Thunder Bay, they'll tell you that for the last three years or longer, the higher-end homes in Thunder Bay are the ones that they've been having a hard time keeping on the market and that there's not enough of them. They've been saying that for three years. It's these jobs that I'm just describing to you; these are the jobs that are buying those homes. People are coming into our community. Some of them are people who have lived in our community, and they are the ones who are purchasing those homes. There is some good news, even though, as I've said, we acknowledge the difficult circumstances that some people have found themselves in. So some good news there.

I mentioned the 1,600 number. Our government made a \$200-million investment in mass transit in the province of Ontario. That was part of an environmental policy that we adopted some time ago and committed to coming into the election of 2003; an environmental policy to get people out of their cars and into mass transit. That \$200 million flowed to the TTC who went out with a tender and came back with a \$650-million contract, almost entirely all of it landing in the city of Thunder Bay at the local Bombardier plant. I think it's fair to say that contract would not have been tendered without our \$200-million investment. As a result of that \$650-million contract—I can tell you that in the history of my community, it's not often that you see a contract of that size land in our community—it has led directly to 300 additional incremental, long-term, good-paying jobs in our community. So there is some good news, and plenty of it actually, occurring in certain sectors in my community and I think in other communities across the province of Ontario.

What is it that we can do in these difficult circumstances? If you talk to economists—and I don't know if we have any elected MPPs here in the Legislature who are trained as economists, but we all read them and they have opinions, and we listen to what they have to say. They work at universities, they work for the banks, and I think it's fair to say, without being too critical, that there may be 10 in a room and we might have 10 different opinions. They are not all of a like mind in terms of what it is that you have to do. There is one common denominator I would suggest when it comes to economists in the province of Ontario: Most of them, if not all, would believe and would say that one of the things you can do when you find yourself in difficult economic times is to invest in public infrastructure. It creates jobs; it's a good use of public money; it increases productivity. We've taken that path.

I know other parties have different positions. The official opposition is more about tax cuts, and I'm not sure what, broader than that, they have to suggest at this point, but I do know there is an opposition day motion today and perhaps we will hear a bit from them beyond tax cuts, what it is that they would suggest we do in these

difficult times. To be fair, the third party, at the risk of sounding a bit glib, perhaps, is just, "Let's spend our way out of this somehow."

I can tell you about some of the infrastructure investments that we've made in Thunder Bay that have created a tremendous amount of employment and have mitigated increases in the tax base. Two new young offenders facilities, one in Thunder Bay and one in Fort Frances, invested in by our government—approximately a \$30-million investment. Brand new high school—\$30 million from our government. Brand new George Jeffrey Children's Centre for children with physical disabilities—our government gave \$7 million to an \$11-million building. There is a \$9 million small project going on right now at the hospital to accommodate doctors' training and residency training; \$11 million for the Bare Point water treatment facility; \$100 million out of \$150 million for the Sioux Lookout hospital; in Fort Frances, a \$22-million grant for an \$85-million construction project, a cogen project. Clean energy—we'll get a pulp and paper mill almost entirely off the grid, stabilize an entire community and create \$85 million of construction work. Terrace Bay reopened the pulp and paper mill—\$22 million worth of financial assistance for a \$45-million construction job. A new courthouse coming—it's has been announced—an approximately \$40-million construction job. The new Sister Margaret Smith Centre, currently being constructed—a \$15-million job. A new long-term-care home and supportive housing project will come in as an \$80-million to \$100-million construction job. And tens of millions more for roads and bridges—this is only a partial list that I've given you.

This adds up to a tremendous amount of investment in my riding of Thunder Bay—Atikokan and in my colleague's, Minister Gravelle of Thunder Bay—Superior North—a tremendous amount of investment. I can tell you who is happy. If you talk to the building tradespeople, they are extremely happy—and I've talked to them. Local 628, whom I met with last week, with 300 men, none in the hall—none—290 to 300. All of them are working. And similar stories for all of the trades out of locals in Thunder Bay. The mayors and reeves of Thunder Bay—Atikokan are very happy, I can tell you, as well—Mayor Lynn Peterson from the city of Thunder Bay, and all my mayors and reeves in my smaller communities of Oliver, Paipoonge, Neebing, and Conmee.

My Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has met some of these people and they have come to really appreciate his assistance as well. Conmee, O'Connor, Gillies, Atikokan—all of these small communities, I should say, with large geographic land bases and a small tax base with which to support the infrastructure requirements of those communities. That's where we've come forward with a lot of financial assistance. We have done a lot to help them to mitigate tax increases for their communities and to provide them with resources so that they can do the work that is required to be done.

That is the piece that most people agree upon, but beyond that we've seen a tremendous amount of diversi-

fication occurring in my community as well. We've invested heavily on the knowledge-based side, and that is the work that's incremental. It's creating different jobs; it's not splitting the pie. One of them I would like to talk about is a task force I've been sitting on for about the past four months.

0920

A wonderful announcement came out of the Ministry of Research and Innovation—which in and of itself is a wonderful creation, and I think it's something we should probably talk a bit more about—that speaks to what the Premier saw coming in Ontario in terms of how we needed to change our approach when it came to getting intellectual property and then turning that property into commercialized products which would lead to job creation in the province of Ontario.

One of the things that has been announced out of that ministry—and I thank Minister Wilkinson for this—is something in Thunder Bay called CRIBE. I'm hoping that my constituents, in the next little while, are going to learn a little bit more about CRIBE. CRIBE is an acronym that stands for the Centre for Research and Innovation in the Bio-Economy. Our government made a \$25-million commitment to CRIBE. I, along with the mayor and the presidents of the college and the universities and a couple of others, have sat on this task force. We've developed a report that will go back to the minister, and we believe that in very short order we are going to start to see the benefits of that \$25-million commitment to the city of Thunder Bay. It is going to establish cutting-edge research, some of which will be housed at the university, but the bigger and more important part, I believe, is that it's going to hopefully—this is where we're going to do our work going forward—land us a large industrial partner that's going to come in and do work in what is this new economy. We are going to help them along with a \$25-million commitment. So this is very important.

I have very limited time left out of my 20 minutes here, so I do want to wrap up by reminding people that the situation that we find ourselves in now is one that, as a government, we feel we've prepared for pretty well. People are aware of our five-point plan. They know that, as the opposition likes to talk about, on the tax side we have done some work, cutting business taxes, especially in northern Ontario, where the business education tax was very high—disproportionately high to the rest of the province. We've made major investments in infrastructure. We are supporting innovation, some of which I've described to you, through the announcement of the CRIBE centre in Thunder Bay. We are partnering with business. Many of us here are fully aware of the investments that we've made in the auto sector, where we have—the Toyota plant, I think, landed in Woodstock. Flex plants have occurred in at least a couple of communities across the province, and we continue to invest in the skills of our people.

So while we do acknowledge that we find ourselves in very difficult and challenging times—that goes without saying—I appreciated my 20 minutes this morning just to

provide some of the other side of the story, I guess is the best way for me to characterize it. While it is difficult, there are things that we're doing. There are some good-news stories out there, even though we know that there are families and individuals who have been negatively affected. I want to thank you for your time this morning.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller: It's my pleasure to have the opportunity to debate this economy motion that has been debated the last number of days. The timing of Mr. McGuinty's economy motion is interesting. It seems to suggest that he waited until the absolute worst-case scenario before taking action. The storm clouds have been brewing on the horizon for a few years now. This situation didn't just develop overnight.

Over the past few years, Ontario has been steadily moving towards have-not status within Confederation. In 2007, Ontario had the slowest growth in Canada for the first time since the 1991 recession. Four out of five major banks ranked Ontario ninth out of 10 provinces in terms of economic growth for 2008. Ontario is experiencing one of the biggest out-migrations in recent memory. Ontario has shed tens of thousands of manufacturing jobs. All the while, opposition members have been pleading for this government to take action: to control spending, to pay down the deficit, to do something. All the while, Mr. McGuinty and his colleagues have been in denial.

So here we are, with this motion before us, after weeks of watching volatile markets around the globe, and finally Mr. McGuinty announces that the Legislature “acknowledges our province faces economic challenges.” It seems like a bit of an understatement. So what is Mr. McGuinty suggesting? Well, he has a five-point plan. He wants to invest in the skills of our people, make targeted tax cuts, invest in research and innovation, invest in infrastructure and partner with businesses. He suggests expanding trade ties within Canada and internationally, and he's looking for fairness from the federal government for Ontarians. For the most part, this plan is a re-introduction of comments and policies that his government has been following for many months now. Even his criticism of the federal government is nothing new.

I'd like to give Mr. McGuinty a different vantage point from my perspective as the small business critic. I think this is particularly relevant given that small businesses form such a significant part of Ontario's economy. Depending on whose numbers you use, small businesses make up to 96% of businesses. So it only makes sense that government policies would help support small business. To begin with, it is time to recognize that small business is important to us and that wealth creators are important to all of us. They make it possible to provide social services and implement poverty strategies. They fund our health care and education programs through the taxes they generate and the jobs they provide, which also generate income tax. So I think we can all agree that we need to help small business if we want to keep Ontario's economy going, let alone growing.

I hear from small businesses every day, both in my riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka and across the province. I'm going to recount some of their experiences so you can better understand some of their hardships.

A Markham company contacted me about a retail sales tax audit. They own a media production company, which includes videographing weddings and corporate functions. They have three employees. When the company started they went to the chamber of commerce seminar and were told to use tax guide 901, *The Basics of Retail Sales Tax*. They noted that photography was not listed under taxable services and therefore never collected tax. They promptly reported their monthly sales and remitted retail sales tax on time. Recently, they received an RST assessment and were advised that they were doing it wrong for the past four years. They've been reassessed—all services, not just products. The assessor told them they should have been using guide 509 and didn't seem to know anything about guide 901. The preliminary assessment is \$47,000 plus interest and penalties, which could push the total to \$100,000. As it stands today, this business has been advised that, regardless of the misinformation and the fact that the guide they were working off does not include photography and videography in the definition of taxable service, they will be charged the full amount. In fact, they will even be charged for contracts that have not received any tangible product because they have divorced or not picked up their images or property.

They ask, "How can a company be charged back taxes on property that has never been received by the client?" It's a very good question. How can a small business be penalized for misinformation given to them straight from the Ontario government? They ask, "Is the province of Ontario in the business of putting small business out of business for doing their best to comply with tax laws?" How is a small business to survive when the necessary information needed to comply is not readily available, and where it is available, it can't be trusted? This small business now has two auditors and a supervisor reviewing their accounts. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated case.

Recently, a small business in my riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka had a similar experience. A dock builder contacted my office. I'm not talking about small docks but the large ones that you see out on the lakes. He had never collected retail sales tax on the docks because at the time of starting his business he was advised that the docks were not a taxable product because the docks do not move with the cottage or the homeowner. Several years later, the business operator received a notice that he should have been collecting retail sales tax on the docks and was handed a very large assessment. He contacted my office and after some discussion with retail sales staff, it was determined that these docks definitely do not move from one property to another and that the business owner was correct in not collecting the tax.

In both of these cases the business owners did not collect tax and therefore they did not improperly pocket tax that had been collected. In other words, there's no

profit being made by the business owners here. In both cases, the fines and penalties had the potential of putting the owners out of business, with devastating effects not just for the owners but for their employees as well. People who enter into business do not deliberately set out to break the retail sales tax rules. In fact, in both cases owners attempted to get direction from the Ministry of Finance when they started their businesses and were given advice on the appropriate collection of tax. They both followed the advice they were given. Their only mistake was not getting the names of the people at the ministry who provided that advice, and perhaps not getting it in writing, which would be my advice in future.

0930

It is simply not fair to come back to a business and hand them a bill for taxes they never collected. This is where government needs to inform business instead of penalizing business.

Too often, the heavy hand of government crushes small businesses to the breaking point. For example, Stephanie Watt, president of Cash Rolls of Canada, operated a manufacturing business in Guelph. Owned and operated since 1985, Cash Rolls was the sole manufacturer of paper coin-handling products within Canada. Last summer, an inspector from the Ministry of Labour entered the facility. The inspector had no prior knowledge of this business and shut the plant down for various infractions under the new zero-tolerance policy. In years gone by, when inspectors issued orders, the business was given three weeks to comply. Ms. Watt says that she never knowingly avoided health and safety issues. As a result of this incident, Ms. Watt shut down her manufacturing business—not because of the high dollar or global competition; she shut down her manufacturing business solely because of this government's callous attitude towards small business. As a result, she has moved that business and those jobs to the United States. Now 11 people in Guelph are without a job, and the Ontario economy is without the \$1 million a year that her business provided. Cash Rolls no longer needs the raw materials supplied from local paper and corrugated companies in Ontario. They will no longer be supporting the local economy in Guelph either. Sadly, no one in the Ontario government seems to care. The inspector was not willing to work with her, and the Ministry of Labour had no interest in preserving these jobs either.

It's my experience that no employer knowingly wants to see their workers injured, but time and time again, inspectors take a confrontational stand with business owners.

The lack of support for small business doesn't end with these examples. Not long ago, I met with a convenience store operator. He told me that times are tough. He has been in business for four years, and recently an inspector arrived at his business and wanted to see all the receipts for the past four years for cigars purchased. If he couldn't produce the receipts, he would be presented with a fine of \$10,000. At no time since he bought the business has anyone from the government come around

to tell him that he should be hanging on to these receipts. In fact, at no time has anyone from the government come in to give him any kind of advice or support on how to comply with your government regulations, which is precisely the problem.

To make matters worse, even when this government makes a promise about regulation, you can't rely on it. Case in point: the Endangered Species Act and forest management plans. The forestry sector in this province has long had a world-renowned platinum standard for excellence, a record that began under the Harris government with the largest conservation efforts our province has ever seen. Our forest management practices have worked in support of endangered species, and the science proves that species have been brought back from the brink under current forestry practices, species like caribou, red-shouldered hawks and bald eagles.

Now the McGuinty government has reneged on its commitment to provide for long-term regulation under their new Endangered Species Act. The industry was in shock, because it had been working in good faith with the ministry in the development of regulations that would recognize current forest management plans—yet another example of government run amok.

What about the agriculture sector? I met with farmers from east Parry Sound region to hear their concerns just last week. They can really tell you a thing or two about government regulation: nutrient management, source water protection, pesticides bans, Bill 50, to name a few. How is a farmer supposed to cope with running a farm, managing livestock, planting a crop, coping with inclement weather, and make head or tail of government jargon? One farmer told me that his accountant told him it would cost \$500 in accounting fees to apply for an OMAFRA income program but he would only get \$235 in return. He wisely decided against it.

Last month I held a small-business round table so I could better understand the challenges facing businesses today. Things have changed a little since I was in business. A hot topic among tourism businesses was the tourism-oriented directional signs, or TODS, program. The chief complaint had to do with poor customer service at every level, whether in responding to questions, processing applications or erecting signs.

A resort owner told me how he was contacted by the Ministry of the Environment. He was asked to provide copies of all his certificates of approval for each of his small waste water systems. He told the ministry official that all the certificates had been issued by the ministry and they should simply check their records. Sounds fairly logical to me. The ministry representative told him that they had lost some of their records and therefore the burden of proving certificates that had been issued now fell to the owner. How is this reasonable?

Just this week the government has confirmed that it is moving legislation that will penalize small business, forcing them to take on extra costs by making workers' compensation mandatory for all construction workers. Judith Andrew, director of provincial affairs for the

Canadian Federation of Independent Business, calls this a very anti-small business agenda. She goes on to say, "I cannot begin to say how disturbed we are to have" labour "Minister Fonseca put forward this crazy policy."

The minister suggests this legislation will level the playing field and help to eliminate the underground construction economy. The CFIB points out that the existence of the underground economy is rooted in the government's—and more particularly the WSIB's—inability to enforce the current laws and regulations. Furthermore, they point out that there is no evidence to support the suggestion that making coverage mandatory will result in improved worker health and safety. The only sure effect will be a significant increase in costs for small construction businesses.

The TD small business survey results were recently released and they show that small businesses are worried about cash flow, about making payroll, suppliers' bills, and rising fuel and energy costs. Small businesses are being crushed under the weight of red tape and regulation and they are afraid of the heavy hand of government that punishes and penalizes for non-compliance.

The CFIB in a recent survey announced that two out of three businesses surveyed say that the overall burden of provincial regulations has increased in the past three years. So what can we do? Or rather, what can the McGuinty government do? I'd like to suggest that Mr. McGuinty start by taking a look at what British Columbia is doing. In 2001, the government of the province of BC decided to create Canada's most small-business-friendly environment. They didn't pass legislation. Instead, they partnered with small business and formed a strategy that has informed every government ministry. They have five key components. They started by measuring the extent of the burden by counting all regulatory requirements in existing legislation and set up a database to chart their progress. They initiated a regulatory reform policy to ensure that any new regulatory requirements were in fact necessary, results-based and not overly burdensome. All ministries and agencies set up three-year plans to review existing regulations and identify areas of improvement and meet target reductions. Then, to ensure accountability, they added quarterly reporting requirements. Finally, the government of BC set up a regulatory reform office to implement the strategy and a minister to oversee and champion the effort. Since 2001, BC has reduced regulatory requirements by 42%. They continue to strive for a zero net increase in regulation.

So what did this directive really mean for business? Over 3,000 fees and licences across the government were eliminated or consolidated. Applications for programs such as the child care subsidy were reduced from 28 to three pages. The Ministry of Forests reduced road permit approvals from 20 to 14 business days. Liquor licences were streamlined from 19 to two classes. Primarily, it seems to me that the government of BC understands that it needs to change the culture of government to create wealth—not wealth creation for its own sake but for the sake of all those who benefit, which is everyone.

So how is this different from Ontario? Here, small business tells me that the culture of government is punitive and heavy-handed. The minister responsible for small business shows no interest in informing small business about regulation, providing support to achieve compliance or reducing the volume of regulation. It is something I personally have found very disappointing and troubling. As a past business owner, I remember a time when inspectors would come to your business with advice and direction to help you comply with regulations—not so today.

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So where does Mr. McGuinty go with his five-point plan? Why not make partnering with business a genuine partnership? Work with business, not against it. Sit down and talk or, better still, listen. Borrow from other provinces: If it makes sense in BC, why not in Ontario? Begin a regulatory review and reduction strategy now as part of your economic statement. Ontario's economic situation cries out for effective leadership.

Constituents in my riding expect not only leadership, but they demand that partisan politics be set aside to ensure greater stability, responsibility and accountability. Consumer and business confidences have faltered. Over the years, the McGuinty government has put a great deal of energy into blaming the federal government for everything that's wrong in the province of Ontario. They have been very slow to accept any responsibility. Day after day, government members can be heard blaming past governments, as we just heard from the last member, for problems they are facing now. It is time for the blame game to end.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I'm very pleased to join in this important debate this morning and have an opportunity to talk about how our five-point plan for Ontario's economy affects the community that I'm privileged to represent, Etobicoke–Lakeshore, in a very positive way. As we look to the actions that need to be taken—by governments around North America, I would suggest—to weather what is an economic storm front already hovering over our economies, it is absolutely critical that we look as a government to the foundations that we've laid in the past, because the foundations that we've laid since we were privileged to form office in 2003 are those very foundations that we will turn to to help our communities expand and improve and continue to grow, prosper and weather this storm.

One of the first things that I was apprised of when I was elected was the negative consequence of business taxes on my local businesses in Etobicoke–Lakeshore and how those businesses that operate every single day on our roadways on Lake Shore Boulevard, on the Queensway, on Dundas, that make up the face of our community, that ensure that our communities are safe and that ensure that our communities have local businesses and activities, were suffering under very severe and high business education taxes. One of the very first

things that we did at our economic summits that we had in the community with respect to how we can improve business in Etobicoke–Lakeshore was to very much focus with our local businesses—and I took up the call of championing a cut to business education tax rates. We have seen a \$540-million cut announced with respect to the city of Toronto, which on average is a 19% reduction in taxes paid by businesses in Toronto. We do have a way to go. We continue to have challenges within the city of Toronto itself as to the business education tax rates that had been put in place in various communities prior to amalgamation that are now perhaps not equitable post-amalgamation, and we continue to work on that.

Another avenue of business taxation that my community has benefited from is the extended digital media tax credit. Some of you might not know, but Etobicoke–Lakeshore is a hub of small activities when it comes to the digital and entertainment media sector. Those businesses that operate in all sorts of places across the community, that many members who even live in Etobicoke aren't aware of, are really benefiting from the investments and that focus on what is a modern source of employment and a modern economic driver in Etobicoke, and we're very, very proud of that.

There's no doubt that improvements to our public services are absolutely critical to both stimulating the economy and helping our families, helping our communities have the services they need to turn to when perhaps times are more challenging in the province, as they are right now. It's been very important to my community that, for example, Trillium Health Centre on the Queensway has an expanded ambulatory care centre, has a very good track record when it comes to servicing our community for their ambulatory care needs. We've had many celebrations over the years at the Trillium Health Centre in terms of the wonderful work that's being done there, whether it's with respect to the new spine clinic or the new cancer clinic. So much progressive and innovative work is transpiring at Trillium Health Centre and a real renewal and modernization of what we call in Etobicoke the old Queensway hospital, now part of the amalgamated Trillium Health Centre, and a real beacon and leader in terms of modern mechanisms of providing incredibly strong health care in Etobicoke–Lakeshore. I think it's a prime example of how we can have the best health care and continue to make sure that our health care system, our medicare system, progresses, is innovative and can meet the needs of our communities well into the years ahead in the next century.

We also have on the site of Trillium Health Centre, in very close proximity to it, an investment that the province has made with respect to community and resident palliative care at the Dorothy Ley Hospice. This is an organization in our community that so many of us have worked with, and we are very proud of the work that has been done by hundreds upon hundreds of volunteers and contributors. We're well under way constructing the Dorothy Ley Hospice, which will be a green building, a modern building, and will provide community residential

palliative care and also assistance to families whose members are in the last stages of their life and are choosing to stay in their own homes—so again, a really progressive approach to helping our families deal with challenging times.

That is, at its heart, what the five-point plan is about. We can stand in the Legislature and talk about five-point action plans, and they seem very distant perhaps from what is transpiring on the ground in our communities, in people's homes, and what they're talking about and what their needs are. But I would suggest to you that it is exactly what our communities need to see: continued investments in infrastructure like the ones that I've talked about.

Over the weekend, I had the chance to get out for a walk with my family—my children, my husband, my dog. We were walking near Humber Lakeshore Campus and we could see all the activity in and around the buildings at Humber College. That, too, flows from significant investments, infrastructure investments, that our government has made to finalize and finish the last repairs on the buildings at Humber campus. If you haven't had a chance, Speaker, and my colleagues in the House, to go to see Humber Lakeshore Campus, it is an incredibly beautiful campus. It's the old Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital and those buildings have been preserved and renovated. The last of those buildings is under renovation right now and we see those dollars at work in our community, making that a real hub of activity in Etobicoke.

Obviously, in a riding named Etobicoke–Lakeshore, a prominent part of what is important to our community is the lakeshore. We have a long, long stretch of Lake Ontario bordering the community. That Humber campus is on the lakeshore, in sort of the western end of my riding, and a little bit more to the east is Mimico Linear Park. It is a huge expansion of Toronto's waterfront, a significant investment to bring that waterfront to make it more accessible to the people in our community and beyond. There's something that is really special in our city, and that is the ability to get on your bike in Etobicoke and ride it across to the east end or to the west end, wherever you might go.

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There are parts and pockets in the city where the trail doesn't continue, and we had that circumstance in Etobicoke. Mimico Linear Park has seen a really big investment from Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corp., which is funded by all three levels of government. The work that we've been able to do in Etobicoke along the waterfront, and along the waterfront across the city, is reflective of the good things that can happen when governments do work together in the regeneration of the lakefront. We have now completed a portion of Mimico Linear Park, and we've had a commitment from Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corp., following submissions by me, my federal colleague Michael Ignatieff, and our municipal councillor, Mark Grimes, all attending at the Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corp. meetings to say, "This is really important to our community." It will be an

economic development driver and will help us bring people along the lakeshore into that part of Etobicoke, to go to the coffee shops, get a sandwich, go have a glass of juice, go to some of our local businesses. So, for us, tying these improvements and really recognizing that these will be things that will stimulate the economy is a concrete example of how infrastructure investments and repairing and making the waterfront accessible will bring economic renewal into the community.

Another aspect of infrastructure investment that supports economic development and makes it easier for people to get to work, for businesses to choose to locate in a community such as Etobicoke–Lakeshore, is public transit. I'm so proud of the work that our government has done with respect to investments in public transit. My community has three GO train stations and four subway stations, and we have the opportunity to see the benefit of access to public transit in terms of businesses choosing to locate. When I talk to businesses about coming and locating in Etobicoke–Lakeshore and setting up shop, one of the things that they always ask me is, "How will our workforce get to us?" If you ask businesses that have located in Etobicoke, one of the things that they talk about is good access to the airport, easy access to a number of routes of public transit, and we're also at the crossroads of our major highways in the city. So it really helps connect our community, but beyond that, it connects our community to the broader GTA, and around the world, frankly, when you have access to that transit.

There's no doubt that we are in the middle of some very challenging economic times. We've had challenges in my own community. One of the things that I've been privileged to do is have an opportunity to sit down and talk to those individuals around the community who are looking ahead or who have lost their employment about what we are putting in place to help individuals find new employment. The role of government is to make sure that we look after our community when they need that assistance, and the job action centres that are open for Arvin-Meritor and Owens-Illinois employees and former employees are critical examples of how government support can help individuals find their way when challenges arise. Whether it's with respect to giving hands-on guidance as to how to gain their GED, upgrade their skill set, improve their resumé, look for work, all of that is critical to help find a pathway for someone who has worked for many, many years in a very good job that has provided a good living wage to their family, and now they are at a crossroads. When you're at a crossroads and you need that assistance, to have someone who cares very much about you, as I have observed and met the individuals who work in these job action centres—the compassion, the experience that they bring to help individuals find their way at this very difficult time in their life is critical.

I'm very proud that our government has really extended the work being done by our Employment Ontario centres with respect to apprenticeships, Second Career, a whole variety of options that are available, because peo-

ple are not all the same. They have different circumstances in their lives. They might be more towards the beginning of their career, and they might be choosing to look for a whole new second career. They might not be; they might only have a few years left in terms of how long they expect or desire to work. We have a variety of services available to meet the variety of people who live in our communities and work in our communities, and the work that's being done, with the support of the province, is very important.

When I think about what's important to my community, I think about really basic things. If they have a job, they want to keep that job. What can the province do to assist in making sure that we support businesses that want to transition to newer economies, to doing things in a more innovative way, like our advanced manufacturing investment strategy—the work that's being done by the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade to make sure that local businesses that are doing great work can continue to do that.

We know that it's a challenge across North America. We know that there are many places that businesses could locate and that there are always forces pulling those businesses perhaps closer to head office, wherever it might be. We know that having a government that's a partner at the table is a consideration when businesses either choose to remain or choose to locate in the first instance, and that is exactly what they have with our Ministry of Economic Development and Trade—a real partner at the table who is willing to sit down with them, to have an opportunity to talk about the variety of programs that we've put in place to ensure that businesses prosper in Ontario and that we help move our entire manufacturing sector and economic sector to a modernized economic sector. They're using the new technology; they're leading-edge. I know I'm very pleased to have many, many of those businesses in Etobicoke that are looking to what is the next generation for our area of expertise, our area of manufacturing.

This past Friday, I had the opportunity to have a very extensive tour of our Campbell facility. Campbell's has been in our community for many, many years. It's a prime example of urban manufacturing immediately beside a school, beside the residents who live there, and how manufacturing can work in urban centres. Campbell Soup has been a great neighbour in our community and continues to be. They have modernized their facility, they've invested in Etobicoke, they are partners in terms of good things that happen in our community. It was very important for me to bring folks from the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade into Campbell. Let's sit down and talk about how we can help them continue to weather this economic storm and continue to prosper in Etobicoke, because we want to see that economic driver remain as it has for many, many years as an important part of our community.

The other thing you turn to in times of economic downturn is you want to make sure that your kids have a good education. The investments that we have made as a

government in improving education, whether it's elementary education, secondary education, post-secondary, college or university—those investments are of critical importance, because every single parent no doubt feels the same as me: You want the absolute best for your kids. You want to make sure that they have the opportunities ahead of them that you had for yourself, and beyond that. As we look to storm clouds on the horizon, I know there are many parents who are saying, "I want my children to get a good education and I want them to be educated in a realm where there is a real opportunity to find a great career, one that they will love, for them to be able to choose to stay in Etobicoke," if that's where they live, or certainly in our province. There is no doubt that the work we're doing with respect to the five-point economic plan, whether it's cutting our business taxes, investing in infrastructure, supporting innovation—and that's critical on so many levels. Innovation will lead us into a prosperous future and will give that exact opportunity to our children and their children to make sure that they can continue to know Ontario as we know it: a great place to live, to work, to raise your family, to invest, to prosper and build a life for you and your family.

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That's what the five-point economic plan is all about. It's about finding a way to work in partnership with our communities, with our businesses, with folks in the Legislature who have the privilege of representing those communities, and to find a way forward through the storm clouds to come out where we all want to be. We all want what is the best for our families and for our communities. Perhaps we go about it in different ways at times, but I think that at this time in our history, it is absolutely critical for us to work together, for us to be proud of the province that we are privileged to represent, and that we join forces to make sure that Ontario continues to be the best place to be.

I really look ahead to the future of my children, and I know that with that good, hard, collective work of all of us together in this province, we will continue to be very, very proud of where we are, and we will weather these storm clouds. I look forward to having the privilege to shepherd that as much as I can in my own community, because I'm very proud that Etobicoke-Lakeshore is a community that does work together, and I would like to bring that example here to the Legislature.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Frank Klees: I want to begin my remarks by quoting a former Ontario assistant deputy minister of finance, Michael Mendelson, who is now a senior scholar at the Caledon Institute of Social Policy. He offers this advice in a contributing article to the *Toronto Star* on October 9 this year. I pass it along to my colleagues as we deliberate on how we, as a province, can best prepare for and deal with the current economic challenges.

"Canada is headed into stormy economic times. Our governments seem determined to navigate these waters with their eyes closed. We need instead to face reality

right now and start realistic planning for the seemingly inevitable moment when the fiscal dam bursts.”

Mr. Mendelson gives us wise advice when he exhorts government to do two things: first, face reality; and second, start realistic planning. While this advice seems rather basic, I suggest that Mr. Mendelson’s many years in government taught him that neither of these two things comes easily for government. Perhaps that’s because governments of all political stripes are often more focused on spinning public opinion and shaping how their performance is perceived rather than on the task of managing the affairs of government and being accountable for their actions. In fact, the staging of this very debate is an unfortunate example of how even the proceedings of this Legislature can be manipulated to serve the crass public relations objectives of a government.

You see, in response to the tabling of a carefully crafted and self-serving motion, members of this House are being asked by the Premier to provide input into the government’s economic plan, yet the Premier and the Minister of Finance rejected out of hand the very first proposal made by the official opposition. That proposal was to strike a select committee, structured on a non-partisan basis, for the purpose of reviewing the recommendations brought forward by members in the course of this debate and that the committee be mandated and resourced to develop an action plan for Ontario’s economy. An important aspect of that committee’s work would be to solicit public input by hosting meetings, hearings, public hearings in communities across the province, where job losses and the economic crisis are having the most direct impact.

Taking the hearings to communities now is imperative if, as the finance minister claims, he looks forward to the input of the people of Ontario. In fact, it’s the only way to get a realistic understanding of the challenges that individual families and businesses are facing, and it’s the only way that we can cut through the government’s rhetoric whenever we ask in this place about job losses and business closures in specific communities. The briefing book responses are always the same, whether they come from the Premier or the finance minister or the two ministers responsible for economic development in this province, namely—we’ve all heard it: “Thousands of new jobs have been created, retraining programs are in place and grant and loan guarantee programs are available.”

These are all 30,000-foot-level responses to questions that deal with street-level hardships. Those general responses do nothing for the factory worker who is unemployed, they do absolutely nothing for the family that is facing eviction, and they do nothing for the company that’s waiting for the cash to arrive from one of the government’s much-heralded grant programs. Rather than being thrown a lifeline, they find themselves being strangled by bureaucratic red tape, delays and demoralizing excuses and even more promises.

That’s why we are calling for a non-partisan select committee of this Legislature to deal in a practical way,

in a forthright manner, with the challenges that we’re facing in this province. That will force the government to open its eyes to the reality of the extent of the problem. It will give us a realistic sense of the needs and priorities that will ensure that this Legislature, and through it, the government, gets the best possible advice for a meaningful and practical action plan for Ontario’s economy.

If the Premier does not want to listen to his colleagues in this House, if he doesn’t want to listen to the opposition, perhaps he’ll consider the call for a select committee from another source. Yesterday’s Toronto Star editorial, under the heading “MPPs and the Economy,” had this to say in response to the Premier’s claim that the annual pre-budget consultation hearings of the Standing Committee on Finance are all that’s needed: “Those consultations—a parade of special-interest groups arguing for tax breaks or spending increases in the spring budget—hardly amount to the kind of long-term, comprehensive examination of the province’s economic future that is needed.” The editorial goes on to say that the idea of a non-partisan standing committee is a good one and, “Under the current circumstances, the government should not dismiss it so cavalierly.”

I’ve been in this House for 14 years. I don’t believe that I’ve ever had the opportunity to read an editorial from the Toronto Star supporting an idea put forward by the Progressive Conservatives in this House. But these are unique times, they are troubling times, and this is precisely the time when the Premier and his ministers and this government should be taking a position that this is not a time for partisan rhetoric; it’s a time when we all need to work together to find solutions.

So I would ask once again that the Premier and his finance minister stand by their commitment that their consultations with members of this Legislature and the people of Ontario would in fact be meaningful. The Premier said this on October 8: “We’ll have an opportunity to hear ideas, hopefully positive ideas, put forward by all members of this House, and using that information, we can help better inform the ... economic statement and we can help to inform the budget. We see it as a productive, important exercise in keeping with the values and desires of the people of Ontario.”

The Premier again, later that same day, said this, “I see this as an important opportunity for Ontarians to speak to those issues and, again, to provide their particular perspectives on this, to share their insights in terms of what they think is happening, to get a better sense of how external events are going to affect us inside, here in Ontario.”

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The Minister of Finance, on that same day, standing in his place here, said this: “We look forward to the input of the opposition and the people of Ontario as we move forward in a challenging world economy.”

Again, the Minister of Finance: “We need a debate on the economy. We welcome the opportunity for that debate so that we can further reinforce the appropriateness of our policy decisions to date and make adjust-

ments as we go forward in a very challenging world economy.”

We will remain optimistic that those intentions, as expressed by the Premier and the finance minister, will be confirmed by an agreement to accept the official opposition's proposal for an all-party select committee of the Legislature to chart a new course for Ontario's struggling economy. The official opposition has already put forward a number of specific recommendations that should be included in an action plan for Ontario's economy. Those recommendations were tabled in this House in the form of the amendment to government order number 11, which, in fact, we are debating today, or should be debating today, although I've heard very little specific reference made by members in their debate over the last couple of days to that amendment and to the specific recommendations.

What I have heard is an accusation from members of the government side that all the official opposition members are interested in are tax cuts. I want to, for the record, remind members of the government and the public who are observing this debate of what those recommendations are, and I will list them for you now:

(1) That the taxpayers of Ontario deserve an immediate and comprehensive financial statement that fully opens up the public books, revealing the true state of everything from government revenues to reserve funds, what savings the government has found and how it plans to handle any financial shortfalls;

(2) A competitive tax regime for Ontario businesses;

(3) A specific plan to reduce bureaucratic red tape that is forcing business owners to devote inordinate time and resources for unreasonable and often heavy-handed regulatory compliance;

(4) The adoption of sensible apprenticeship ratios for trades that open up employment opportunities that are currently restricted;

(5) A genuine customer service approach at all levels of government services that will encourage business growth and encourage new investment;

(6) That the government lead by example and demonstrate fiscal responsibility and discipline that should be reflected in sensible public sector restraint on hiring and wage increases;

(7) That the government of Ontario take a leadership role and work in partnership with other levels of government during this economic crisis;

(8) Finally, that the government of Ontario will accept responsibility and will be accountable for those areas over which it has control.

In the time I have remaining, I want to focus on two recommendations contained in our amendment relating to the need to promote genuine customer service at all levels of government, and a call for a plan to reduce bureaucratic red tape and to end the heavy-handed approach to compliance by government agencies.

This is an action that the government can take immediately; it requires no consultation because we have had the input and feedback from businesspeople and

business owners from across the province for the last number of years on this issue. It requires no spending of any money by the government to implement. We have had pleas from individuals, from business owners, to members of this Legislature and to the government to be heard on this issue. To illustrate, I will read an e-mail from a very successful business owner in York region. This was in response to my appeal to the Premier on October 8 to reduce the regulatory burden on Ontario businesses. The e-mail comes from a highly respected second-generation owner of a car dealership:

“You are so right-on regarding the concerns you have expressed which truly represent concerns of many of us in the business sector right now! In fact, since we re-invested in our new dealership, it seems that we are a fresh target and as challenging as these times are, it seems offensive that these civil servants arrive and disrupt the workplace that in our case is all new and a hands-on business, fully cognizant of the importance of safety with a pretty good track record.

“Where are their heads at? What a waste of taxpayers' money!”

This business owner is one of many who are becoming more and more frustrated with the attitude and activities of this government. In case the Premier and his ministers have missed the point, the business owners they are treating with such disrespect are the same business owners who have invested their life savings to start their enterprises. They're the same hard-working people who have created the jobs for the skilled and the unskilled workers in our communities. They are the same business owners who are struggling to stay in business to retain the jobs that are there now and who want to create the jobs of tomorrow.

Speaker, I will continue my remarks after the recess.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I look forward to that. I'm obliged to inform the House that it is 10:15 a.m., and as such, this House is in recess until 10:30 a.m.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The House recessed from 1017 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I'm very pleased to introduce to the Legislature three representatives from the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators who have joined us in the members' gallery today: Adam Schafer, the executive director; Jane Krentz, the regional project coordinator; and Dennis Ozment, the Midwest and Great Lakes project coordinator, who are here to meet with our Ontario legislators today. I know they'd be pleased to speak with other members of the House if they have an opportunity. Please join me in welcoming them.

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Il me fait plaisir de vous présenter aujourd'hui une de mes résidentes, Pauline Desormeaux, qui est ici avec sa sœur, Angèle Brunet. Alors, bienvenue à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I would like to introduce some of page Willem's relatives today. We're delighted to have Tamara Crispin, Helen Crispin and John Frei.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Today we have with us the president of local 786 of CUPE from St. Joseph's hospital in Hamilton, and a number of members of the local, as well as Michael Hurley, the president of the Ontario Council of Hospital Unions and vice-president of CUPE.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Young Kevin Turner is a page here, and his proud, proud parents, Scott Turner and Denise Turner, are here to witness his exemplary conduct today.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would ask all members to join me in welcoming this group of legislative pages serving in the 39th Parliament. Pages, please assemble for your introduction.

Faye Campbell, from Welland; Ethan Chapman, Nipissing; Willem Crispin-Frei, Parkdale-High Park; Chloe Halpenny, Algoma-Manitoulin; Emily Heffernan, Simcoe-Grey; Shaikat Khan, Bramalea-Gore-Malton; Noreen Khimji, Don Valley East; Cole Maranger, Perth-Wellington; Adriane Pong, Halton; Meagan Prins, Richmond Hill; Laura Sawka, Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound; Helen Shen, Scarborough-Agincourt; Jenna Simpson, Thunder Bay-Atikokan; Emma Street, Mississauga-Erindale; Jake Thompson, Simcoe North; Kevin Turner, Durham; Karlee Vanhie, from the great riding of Elgin-Middlesex-London; Elise Wagner, from Guelph; Andrew Walker, Scarborough-Rouge River; and Dan Xuan Wang, Toronto Centre.

Welcome, and enjoy your visit with us. Please reassemble.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is for the Premier. Yesterday, we learned in the pages of his favourite publication that you've advised other Premiers of the news that, in the space of just eight months, you've managed to take this province from a \$5.6-billion surplus to an unspecified multi-million dollar deficit.

Premier, your first responsibility is to the people of Ontario. It's to them you owe an accounting of the province's financial situation, something we've been asking for for weeks. Today, Premier, will you give the elected representatives of this province and the people of Ontario an explanation of just how you've managed to go from a \$5.6-billion surplus to a deficit in just a few months?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm pleased to take the question, but I'm reminded of another \$5.6 billion. That was a deficit that we inherited, and I know that my

honourable colleague opposite was part of a government that ran five deficits. We worked long and hard to remove ourselves from those difficult circumstances. But I know that my friend would recognize that there are extraordinary global economic challenges that are having an impact on us here in Ontario, as well as much of the rest of the world, and I think above all Ontarians want us to act responsibly in these circumstances. That's what we intend to do. We will do as much as we can to protect their services. At the same time, we'll be asking all of our transfer partners, in particular, to help us manage through this difficult, temporary circumstance.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: If Ontarians were looking for any detailed answers, they certainly didn't get it there. The Premier's refusal to do so shows a lack of respect for the taxpayers of this province. He's happy to go to Montreal and air our dirty laundry there, but apparently he doesn't have what it takes to stand in his place and look Ontarians in the eye and admit that he and his government—the decisions they've made over the past number of years—have put us in a place where we're less able to weather an economic downturn.

This morning, he said he expects the municipal sector to be understanding. I guess that means they can look forward to a big, fat goose egg. In his budget, just a few months ago, the finance minister accounted for an \$800-million reserve. He said that there's already an enormous contingency and reserve built into the budget. Premier, where did that reserve go? Where did that \$800 million, which was supposedly going to protect us from a deficit, vanish to?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Our Minister of Finance will provide details on that and other issues tomorrow. I'm proud of the fact that we'll be the first out of the gate nationally to come forward with our fall economic statement and to provide an update. I can tell you, it's not an easy thing to do because we're trying to build our economic health here on shifting sands. The projections put forward by private sector economists are varying on an almost daily basis, so we'll do the best that we can in those circumstances.

But I think in times like this, especially, it's really important that we come back to principles and values. I'm convinced that Ontario families want us to protect their public services. They want us to keep an eye on what is happening today, as well as an eye on our responsibility into the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Answer.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: So we will do what is necessary to protect those public services, mindful of the need to demonstrate restraint at the same time.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Well, Speaker, that was a valid request you just made: "Answer." We certainly didn't hear one again.

Some \$800 million vanished, a \$5.6-billion surplus vanished, and the Premier won't stand in his place today

and look Ontarians in the eye and admit that, really, he and his government and the policies they've followed through the last number of years have put us in this place where we're unable to adequately deal with the storm that we have to weather in the months ahead. He's ignored the warning signs. He's squandered our good fortune on contracts, sweetheart deals for friends, millions and millions on hotels, multi-million dollar parties, and the list goes on.

1040

Those are expenses that he controlled, irresponsible choices that he and his colleagues made. He can't blame the economic crisis for that. His budget of last March—and these things become obsolete faster than computer technology—claimed \$1 billion in savings would be achieved to balance the budget. We've never seen the list, we've never—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, we'll provide the details tomorrow. I'm proud to lead the first government in the country that will speak to a reaction to these extraordinary global economic circumstances.

But I must take issue with something else that my colleague said. We have never been better prepared to withstand these kinds of challenges than we are today. In fact, we fixed the roof while the sun was shining. Education, health care, public protections, whether you're talking about water inspectors, meat inspectors, investments in infrastructure, have never been stronger in the history of our province than they are now. So I would argue that we are better prepared than ever to withstand this powerful, external, global economic crisis. And I'm absolutely convinced that by working together with all of our partners, we will get through this.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Back to the Premier. Over the past few years the Premier hasn't been shy about talking about Ontario as a family, so my question is, why won't he behave in these unprecedented economic times the way families across the province are behaving right now, sitting down, discussing in a calm, rational way—no games, laying it all on the line—how to deal with the current economic challenges?

One of the ways we can do that is through a select committee, a non-partisan, balanced approach, away from the glare of party whips, focused on doing what's right for the family, this great province.

We have a motion coming before the House this afternoon—you're aware of it—and I invite the Premier to stand up today and indicate that he and his colleagues will be supporting that motion.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We've had opportunities and—

Interjections.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: That's not fair, Speaker. That's not fair.

I appreciate the sentiment with which my honourable colleague's question is informed. We have created a number of opportunities for all members of this House to provide suggestions and options, and I'm sure you recognize that the opposition has not been shy in putting forward their various suggestions and proposals.

We're in the middle of a debate right now on the economy and we look forward to hearing more from our colleagues on all sides of the House. I do believe that we are in this together—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Premier. Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: There's the old saying that actions speak louder than words, and the Premier is clinging to the rigidly old way of doing things.

We're in uncharted waters. The finance minister has said so himself on a number of occasions over the past few weeks. The people of the province need us to work together for solutions and stop playing partisan games. That won't get us where we want to be. We need a new approach, new rules. That's what the people of this province want, not just on the economy but throughout the province in the challenges that we all have to face.

So in that spirit, once again I will invite the Premier to stand up today and indicate that he and his colleagues will be supporting our motion later today.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We welcome the debate that the House is having right now on the economy. We take very seriously the suggestions from both opposition parties and the suggestions we're getting from the groups we have been meeting with over the course of the last weeks. We've begun our pre-budget consultations.

The question is getting those issues out in front, and the question is, how do we all work together? There's no doubt that there are a number of forums and opportunities. The debate that we're having in the House these days I think is very informed debate. It's a welcome opportunity to hear from everybody about their relative perspectives on this.

We'll continue to work with our colleagues in the Legislature and we'll continue to work with those in the community, all of whom, I think, want a balanced, full-some approach to the challenges that have been brought upon Ontario by world economic circumstances.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: In 2003, we heard much from the Premier about democratic renewal. He has talked about dealing with this through the finance committee, a standing committee of this Legislature.

Just recently, we had a government bill, Bill 77, before a standing committee of this Legislature. The official opposition tabled close to 70 amendments on that bill. Not one of them was accepted. That's the approach of this government in terms of dealing with issues before us. We've suggested a new approach, a non-partisan approach, to these unprecedented economic challenges.

We're reaching out. We're reaching out on this side of the forum. We're asking you to do the same. Will the Premier and his colleagues stand up today and support the establishment of a non-partisan select committee to deal with the challenges facing this province—yes or no?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Our government has brought forward a number of amendments to the processes of this House that are in fact allowing unprecedented opportunities for members to participate. I think we're seeing jointly sponsored bills and so on.

I would remind the member opposite that what Ontarians want now is a response from all of us. We have the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, and I'll remind the member of its terms of reference. It is "empowered to consider and report to the House its observations, opinions and recommendations on the fiscal and economic policies of the province and to which all related documents shall be deemed to have been referred immediately...." I would suggest to the member that that is an opportunity. I would also suggest to members of that committee that you start your prebudget hearings. We're doing that. I've met with a number of groups in different communities. We'll continue that and we look forward to the participation of—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Premier. In today's Toronto Star, three prominent economists—Arthur Donner, Mike McCracken and Armine Yalnizyan—issue an eloquent plea for aggressive government action in tomorrow's economic statement. They say, "Now is the very time to act—and there are several well-founded economic reasons why we cannot afford to delay action against economic insecurity."

Tomorrow, your government has an opportunity to take action. You can make excuses, as you have over the last five years, while good jobs disappear, or you can present a real jobs plan for Ontario. Which will it be tomorrow, Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I welcome the question, as I welcome the advice put forward by those notable experts, but I want to say that we've got to reconcile all kinds of competing demands for existing resources, let alone new resources, and we will do the very best that we can to act responsibly.

I have said before and I say it again: We will find a way to begin to lay a new foundation for progress when it comes to addressing poverty here in Ontario, and we'll do that in a way that has never been done before. But we will not be able to move as quickly as we would have liked. We will not be able to move as quickly as we would have were it not for this global economic challenge.

I think my friend understands that and I believe that Ontarians accept that. What they want to see from us is progress, and we will make that progress.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: Yes, Ontarians understand that there are global economic problems, they understand that there's a global economy, but what they want to see from the McGuinty government is some action in Ontario to sustain good jobs which are being lost at the rate of thousands a month.

Premier, New Democrats have offered you over the last few weeks a number of suggestions that would help sustain good jobs in this province. That's what these economists are asking for. They are asking for some action from the McGuinty government—not excuses, not blame someone else, not refer to conditions in the United States, but some action here in Ontario to sustain good jobs.

What will it be tomorrow? Will the McGuinty government present a jobs plan to sustain good jobs in Ontario, or will it be another exercise in blaming someone else? Which will it be?

1050

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The honourable member doesn't like to admit it, but I know he does recognize that we've been proceeding aggressively with our five-point plan to strengthen this economy: We have been cutting business taxes; we have been investing dramatically in new infrastructure, thereby creating new jobs; we are investing heavily in innovation; we are finding new and creative ways to partner with business; and we are continuing to invest in the skills and education of our people. Those are solid, principles-based approaches to growing this economy. They've served us very well in recent years. I know that we have not been able to prevent all job losses, and I know that my friend opposite doesn't pretend that that's something that we could have done. But I can say it's the kind of plan that I feel is solid, is sound, and we will continue to find ways to breathe more life into that. I know that my honourable colleague the Minister of Finance will be speaking to that in a bit more detail tomorrow.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The Premier keeps referring to the McGuinty government's five-point plan. Well, while you've been announcing and reannouncing your five-point plan, communities like Goderich lose hundreds of jobs, communities like Welland lose hundreds of jobs, communities like St. Thomas lose hundreds of jobs. It should be apparent to the Premier, because I think it's apparent to everyone else in Ontario, that the much-boasted-about five-point plan isn't doing anything to sustain jobs in Ontario.

Let me quote the three economists: "Better benefits, housing and wages all can act as stimulants to revive our staggering economy." Are we going to see any action on those fronts tomorrow from the McGuinty government, or is it going to be more blah blah blah about a five-point plan that isn't working? Which is it going to be, Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think it's important to be specific here. The manufacturing sector in particular is under attack here in Canada, as it has been in the US for

some time and in the UK and Australia as well. The best experts will tell you that in order to help transition your manufacturing sector to a point where it's more sustainable, you've got to help it transition to a point where they're dealing with advanced manufacturing. Advanced manufacturing means you've got to have higher skills in education; that's why we're investing in that area. You've got to have more sophisticated technology and equipment; that's why we're supporting that. You've got to invest in tax competitiveness; that's why we've been cutting taxes. You've got to invest in infrastructure so that they can get the goods to market faster; that's why we keep investing in infrastructure. Those are the foundations for success when it comes to manufacturing and so many other parts of our economy. It doesn't happen overnight, but it does require perseverance, and we will persevere.

POVERTY

Mr. Howard Hampton: Again, to the Premier: The Premier says, "investing in people." Ontario ranks 10th out of 10 provinces in Canada in investing in post-secondary education. That is a failure. Your so-called Second Career program, which is supposed to be available for workers who've lost their jobs—less than a thousand of the 240,000 workers who've lost their jobs have signed up for your Second Career project because they know it won't help them. Premier, these things aren't working.

The other point that the economists make is that during these difficult economic times, it is very important for governments to pay attention to dealing with poverty. It is more important now, not less important. Will the McGuinty government heed this advice and commit in tomorrow's economic statement to raise the minimum wage to \$10.25 an hour and to improve social assistance benefits so that people living in poverty can make—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We understand how important it is for us to find a way to address poverty. That's why we put it in our platform. That's why we're so committed to finding ways to move forward on that front. That's why, during the course of the past five years, we've done things like create the Ontario child benefit, a monthly payment now flowing to families that will support 1.3 million children. That's why we've increased the minimum wage several times over. That's why we've increased social assistance rates several times over. That's why we've invested in affordable housing. That's why we're investing in a new dental program. That's why we've doubled funding for our student nutrition program to help kids who are coming to school hungry. We've done a number of things and we look forward to doing more.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Once again, the Premier launches into promises that have been made. As for the much-boasted-about child benefit, it will not be imple-

mented until 2011 under the McGuinty government's schedule. By then, poverty will have increased. In fact, there is a new report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development that shows that the gap between rich and poor is actually widening in Ontario today. The Premier neglects to mention that social assistance benefits in Ontario are 30% below what they were in 1990, while the cost of living has skyrocketed since 1990.

Premier, more blah blah blah is not doing it. What are you going to do in tomorrow's economic statement to keep your promises to actually fight poverty in Ontario, as poverty worsens?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: One of the things that we're determined to do through our work, led by Minister Deb Matthews, is to come to grips in a real and pragmatic way with poverty. That requires a plan. So we've committed, by year-end, to putting in place some indicators which help us properly measure poverty, putting in place some targets against which we will measure ourselves and hold ourselves accountable, and putting in place a strategy to help us achieve that target.

Frankly, since I've been in this Legislature for 18 years now, we've done a lot of talk about poverty, but we've never really come to grips with it in a meaningful way. There are never been indicators; there have never been targets; there has never been a deliberate, comprehensive strategy to help us achieve those targets. We intend to do that. We look forward to announcing that before the end of the year.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I agree with something that the Premier said: There's been a lot of talk from the McGuinty government about poverty, but no action. The McGuinty government talks about a low-income dental program, but not a single penny has been invested by the McGuinty government in a low-income dental program; lots of talk, no action. The McGuinty government talks about affordable housing, but you haven't even spent all of the money that the federal government has given you for affordable housing on affordable housing in Ontario. These are the realities.

Premier, it is time to stop the talk; it is time to start taking action. Tomorrow, in the economic statement, the McGuinty government will have the opportunity to actually take some action. Simple question: Will there be some additional funding for affordable housing, something which will keep workers working and help low-income people keep a roof over their heads? Will there be action on that single thing—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague knows that our commitment was to put out a plan by year-end, and we intend to do that. I know that he knows of our commitment to finding a way to address poverty. I know he knows, as well, that we've got to find a way to reconcile all of these competing interests. We want to find more money for our schools for next year. We want

to find more money for our hospitals for next year. We want to find more money for our municipal partners for next year, our colleges and universities, and so on and so on. At the same time, we want to find a way to make progress when it comes to dealing with poverty. I know he recognizes that. I know that Ontarians recognize that. As I said before, we will do that in a way that's in keeping with our values. We'll keep an eye on today, our responsibilities for today, and at the same time make sure that we're progressing tomorrow and that we grow stronger economically every single day.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a question for the Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services. Minister, every time I've tried to ask a question about your support for small business, you've deflected the question to one of your colleagues. My question today is quite simple: Is part of your mandate to help small business?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Absolutely.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Norm Miller: Minister, as I outlined this morning, small businesses are being crushed under the weight of red tape. As the critic, I'm hearing from every sector, from manufacturing, retail, construction, agriculture and tourism. There is no help to be had from you.

In the 2008 budget, your government announced regulatory modernization, which was to include an aggressive cap and trade policy for government regulations. This means that for every new regulation created, one is to be removed. Since then, your government has created five times as many new regulations as it has removed. This is hardly cap and trade. Why have you broken your promise and when are you going to get serious about eliminating red tape?

1100

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I'm actually very proud of the work that we have done, actually, to reduce red tape and to reduce the paper burden on small businesses. I talked about that in the House a couple of weeks ago, but let me just say it again for the benefit of the member.

In the first phase to reduce the paperwork burden on small businesses, in seven key ministries we'll reduce it by 24%. In the second phase, in the next 10 ministries, we'll reduce it by 25.6%. In the third phase, we are reducing it further are right on track to reduce it. Not only that, what we have also done is automated most of those forms so that the small businesses don't have to fill out the forms again and again. But we also have created a secretariat which is going to actually look into the issues of reducing the paperwork burden further and work on the cap-and-trade issue as well.

SOINS DE LONGUE DURÉE

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le premier ministre. Lorsque votre gouvernement a pris le pouvoir,

les Ontariens et les Ontariennes s'attendaient à des actions, à une révolution dans les soins de longue durée. Ces actions doivent commencer avec une garantie de 3,5 heures de soins par résident. Le premier ministre a laissé tomber les personnes âgées de l'Ontario lorsque son gouvernement n'a pas inclus dans la Loi 140 un standard de soins minimal. Est-ce que le premier ministre va profiter de l'énoncé économique de demain pour donner aux résidents de maisons de soins de longue durée les 3,5 heures de soins dont ils ont besoin?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. David Caplan: I want to thank the member for the question. We asked Shirlee Sharkey if she would take a look at the care that was provided in our long-term-care homes, and in fact she produced, I think, an excellent report—I think the members acknowledged it in this House—where she did not recommend that we move in this direction. In fact, Ms. Sharkey has called together and has agreed to lead the implementation team, which includes representation from right across the sector—from labour, from operators, from patient advocates and the like. These are the kinds of investments we've made—over \$1 billion so far, a 50% increase into the long-term-care sector—that have seen significant improvement in long-term care. And I would quote—well, perhaps I'll save it for the supplementary to quote some of the people from the sector about what the effect of these investments has been.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I don't think the minister understood my question. In this time of growing economic insecurity, Ontarians need their government to follow through on what matters the most. That means caring and providing for our loved ones in long-term-care homes. After a lifetime of contributing to our province, seniors deserve the highest standards of care.

How much longer do our parents or grandparents have to wait before they see a guaranteed standard of personal care hours? Will Ontarians finally see the long-term-care commitment they want in tomorrow's economic statement?

Hon. David Caplan: The advice of experts has been, in fact, to proceed under the plan, which was first outlined by my predecessor and which continues to date. That means things like quality improvement, to measure and publicly report health outcomes and the satisfaction of patients for the first time—working with our partners to implement the recommendations that Shirlee Sharkey, quite a noted figure within health care and the sector, noted for us. We have increased staff. We've added 2,500 more personal support workers, 2,000 more nurses, raising the level of paid daily care to 3.26 hours. There are better living environments for residents in long-term care. We're rebuilding over 35,000 additional beds over the course of the next 10 years.

I do want to quote Donna Rubin, the chief executive officer of the Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors. She says, "I want to commend you and the McGuinty government for the recently—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question.

MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I've got a question today for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. In my own riding of Oakville, the partnership we've got with Mayor Burton and Oakville town council is very strong, delivering results. There's almost \$2 million for social housing repairs in this year's budget that goes to Halton region, \$7.5 million invested in Ontario funding for Oakville, and almost \$4 million to rebuild Lakeshore Road in Oakville.

I could provide more examples, but my question today is about participation in local government. We've just seen a federal election that saw 59% turnout, one of the lowest recorded in Canadian history. Members of this House will know that municipal elections often result in even lower turnouts. To ensure that our municipal governments continue to deliver strong public service, we need an engaged public. Minister, I'd like to ask you what you're doing to ensure that the public remains engaged in municipal governments?

Hon. Jim Watson: I think all of us are concerned when we see low voter turnout, whether it's at the federal, provincial or municipal election. It's one of the reasons that we're very pleased to be partnering with the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario, and AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, to launch Local Government Week. I had the pleasure of being in Davenport riding, at Regal Road school, talking to the grade 5 students about the importance of local government. We put together, in collaboration with AMCTO and AMO, an excellent teachers' guide that talks about the importance of civic government and municipal government, and the wonderful services that they provide to their citizens. It's an opportunity for the teachers to hold mock elections, debates and other sessions, and also for municipalities to invite their students to city halls and town halls across the province in partnership with the government of Ontario.

We're very proud of the work we've done, and we look forward to continuing Local Government Week in the years ahead.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I certainly appreciate the work that's being done. I think we can all agree in this House, politicians from all parties, that we need to do more to keep young people engaged in the process. The decisions that we make here are made with those young future voters in mind. Many of us from all parties in this House visit classrooms in grade 5 and grade 10. I was able to talk to students at the University of Toronto recently.

One thing I hear, Minister, when I talk to young people at high schools, or at Sheridan College in my riding, is that politicians should attempt to work together, no matter what order of government or political party.

Young Ontarians don't understand why there's so much confrontation—

Interjections.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Case in point, across the floor.

With the minister's responsibility for Ontario's municipalities, would he tell us what he's doing to set a strong example for young people—

Interjections.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn:—unlike the example being shown here—by working with other orders of government?

Hon. Jim Watson: That was an excellent question, because one of the things I'm particularly proud of—and this is something that the Premier has instilled in all of his ministers—is that we have to respect the municipal order of government. One of the ways of doing that, and it was fulfilled by my predecessor, John Gerretsen, and signed off by the Premier, was the establishment of the MOU process, the memorandum of understanding process, where ministers appear before an AMO table and discuss issues that are going to come before the municipal sector before they're made public. This is a chance for us to alert the municipal sector on some of the important issues that are facing the municipalities, and we thank those members of the MOU table from AMO, people like Hazel McCallion, Peter Hume, the new president of AMO, and Doug Reycraft.

The AMO MOU process and the city of Toronto MOU process is working. We respect the local orders of government, and we look forward to continuing to strengthen that relationship.

VIOLENT CRIME

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Attorney General. It has been just over a week since two Toronto women were sexually assaulted and brutally murdered in their home. The person who has been charged with the murders has been charged with two counts each of aggravated sexual assault, sexual assault with a weapon and attempted choking.

Yesterday, in this Legislature, when I asked you a question about what you intended to do to prevent this situation from ever happening again, you cited the publication ban and the ongoing court matter as an attempt to avoid the question. But, again, it's not about the specifics of this case, Attorney General; it's about the issues of public safety and confidence in the justice system that we're raising.

What do you intend to do about this to protect the people of Ontario?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I say on behalf of, I know, all members of the Legislature and Ontarians: our deepest sympathies to the families, to all those who have been affected and to the community.

With respect to my friend, you weren't doing yesterday what you purport to ask today. The crown's position in all cases is that public safety is paramount. The

crown's position in all cases is that we need to protect the community. We discharged that responsibility. My friend will know that we mustn't do anything, that I can't do anything, that would jeopardize the ongoing proceedings for these very serious cases. My friend would know that there are publication bans that restrict what I can say, what I can respond to and the way that I can respond to it. We will discharge our responsibilities and maintain confidence in the administration by respecting the prosecutions that are ongoing and the publication bans that are in existence.

1110

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Again, Attorney General, it's not about the specifics of this case. People in Ontario are outraged that two innocent lives have been lost. Public confidence in our justice system is eroding. Clearly, there are some systemic issues here, separate and apart from the specifics of this case, that need to be dealt with. What steps do you intend to take, Attorney General, to restore public confidence in our justice system and assure Ontarians of their safety?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Again, public confidence will begin with ensuring that prosecutions are not jeopardized by comments about the specifics of the case. The publication bans, when they're made, are respected. It does restrict my ability to say directly to Ontarians what happened. It does absolutely restrict that. I must respect the bans so that I do not jeopardize the ongoing case.

Public safety is always paramount. We take it very seriously. We put extra resources, in terms of police and crowns, in all of our communities throughout the province of Ontario. We brought in new systems and protections and new means of detecting crime. We will continue to work for the protection of the public. But I say to all, there are things that I cannot say, to ensure that prosecutions can proceed.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. The economic downturn is forcing municipalities to pay even more for provincially mandated social programs like Ontario Works, diverting more of their limited resources away from crumbling infrastructure and other priorities at the municipal level. It is simply wrong that property taxes pay for these programs. Will tomorrow's economic statement make an immediate down payment on provincially mandated services and commit the province to assuming full responsibility for Ontario Works by, at the very least, the fall of 2011?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Jim Watson: Obviously, the member realizes I'm not going to speculate on what's in the Minister of Finance's economic statement, but I can tell you that our track record, the track record of the McGuinty govern-

ment, is very strong when it comes to partnering with our municipal sector.

This year, 100% of the Ontario drug plan was uploaded, taken away from the property taxpayers and put back where it should have been in the first place, with the government of Ontario. Next year, on January 1, a very significant upload begins when ODSP begins the upload process from the property taxpayer to the provincial government.

When the ODSP and ODP uploads are fully uploaded over the course of the next couple of years, \$935 million will be saved by the property taxpayers. That's a track record and a history we should be very proud of, and I'm proud to be the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing who actually is reversing the chaos—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The minister should talk to the Premier, who made it pretty clear this morning in scrums that that couple of years is stretching into an awful lot of years in the next little while.

Municipalities need those dollars, and they don't need empty gestures. The provincial municipal fiscal review is now two whole years old, and still there is no report coming forward. Programs such as Ontario Works, social housing, ambulance, public health and child care all cost municipalities a total sum of about \$2.5 billion a year. That's fewer dollars for sewers, libraries, recreation centres, public transit and roads.

Will the finance minister in his statement finally reverse years of downloading and make significant and immediate down payment on this \$2.5-billion cost and promise to fully upload Ontario Works by the fall of 2011? Or is the provincial municipal fiscal review report being shelved?

Hon. Jim Watson: I am very proud of the partnership that we have developed with AMO and the city of Toronto, working in collaboration and co-operation on the fiscal and service delivery review. We expect that report to be out within the next several weeks. We're very proud of the fact that all parties have agreed to the principle that the report has to be affordable, and it's a consensus-based report. I look forward to releasing that report with AMO, the city of Toronto and my colleague, the Minister of Finance.

But to suggest that this government has been doing nothing on the fiscal relationship is not true. I've given a couple of examples, with ODP and ODSP. Land ambulance—we're now at a 50-50 cost-sharing; public health, we're now at a 75-25 split in cost-sharing. And finally on infrastructure: While the NDP may brush aside \$1.1 billion, that is new money into the municipal sector to help them with the infrastructure deficit.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. David Oraziotti: My question is to the Minister of Labour. Our government places the highest priority on the hard-working people of Ontario and is committed to

making sure Ontario workers have a healthy and safe environment in which to earn a living. A large part of improving workplace health and safety is educating everyone who has a role to play. Employers, workers, suppliers and everyone in the health and safety system have a responsibility to improve conditions at job sites. A key partner in improving conditions for workers is the Ontario Workplace Safety and Insurance Board. I know that each year the WSIB begins an advertising campaign to help educate workers and employers about their rights and responsibilities for health and safety at work. Minister, can you tell us about this year's campaign to protect Ontario workers?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I want to thank the member for the question and for his advocacy on workplace health and safety in the province of Ontario.

I want to talk about the WSIB's fall campaign this year, which started yesterday. The theme of that campaign is You Can Never Be Too Safe. We believe that accidents can be prevented and injury or death at the workplace is unacceptable in the province of Ontario. Workers have the right to refuse unsafe work, because it's their right through the Occupational Health And Safety Act and it's their life on the line.

As you know, Speaker, past WSIB campaigns have been quite hard-hitting and graphic in nature. This year's campaign is quite simple and it wants to send a simple message to all workers: Wear property safety equipment, demand proper training, create safety, make safety happen through your active involvement in the workplace—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. David Oraziotti: I'm pleased to hear about the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board's new ad campaign to promote workplace health and safety. My constituents support this important work and are encouraged by the WSIB's continuing efforts toward accident prevention by educating workers and employers. Unfortunately, it is far too often that we hear about a hard-working Ontarian being injured in the workplace. We all have friends, relatives and colleagues who can share their stories about someone they care about that has suffered an injury or illness in the workplace.

My riding of Sault Ste. Marie is home to Essar Steel Algoma, St. Marys Paper and a number of other industrial businesses that require workers and management to be vigilant to ensure the safety of everyone on the job site. We must continue to support all of the hard working men and women across the province to reduce the number of workplace injuries and fatalities in Ontario.

Minister, can you elaborate on the additional steps that we've taken to support the development of a successful workplace health and safety culture in Ontario?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: We should all be proud of what has been achieved since 2003, with our reduction in workplace fatalities and injuries, and improvement of overall compliance with workplace health and safety legislation. I believe that Ontario's partnership with labour,

with employees, with employers and workplace safety, provides an impressive role model for other jurisdictions. Our success in building and strengthening a culture of workplace health and safety has been achieved by the hard working ministry inspectors, as well as our partners, like the WSIB, as well as safety agencies. But our work is by no means finished. We have done well but we can do a lot more. For example, on June 11, 2008, we launched Safe at Work Ontario. It's the ministry's new four-year compliance strategy. The benefits include a reduction in the burden—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

DIABETES TREATMENT

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Minister of Health. My constituent, Mrs. Genevieve Gittens, is a senior on a fixed pension. She's a diabetic with diabetic retinopathy. Her insulin pump has been her lifeline for the last five years and when she applied to the Ministry of Health for coverage of her insulin pump, she was told she didn't qualify. I brought this to the attention of the minister, wrote a letter, got a response back and the response simply states that coverage is not retroactive.

I want to ask the minister this: How can he justify forcing a senior citizen to take on payments, in addition to her fixed pension, over the next five years—because that's how long it will take her to pay for this insulin pump—at a time when coverage is in place for others during these difficult economic times? How can the minister justify it?

1120

Hon. David Caplan: I think that the member is quite aware that we have launched perhaps the most comprehensive diabetes strategy anywhere in Canada: \$741 million, just announced this past summer. Part of that is to provide, on an ongoing basis—we're not looking retroactively, and the member well knows this—insulin pumps and supplies for residents, and that began this past September. The member is well aware of it, and I'd like to share some of the other elements of the strategy, because I know his resident would be very interested.

We've created 153 diabetes education teams right across the province: in family health teams, in community health centres, in hospitals, teams of registered nurses and dietitians, helping patients manage diabetes and manage their disease more effectively. We're investing \$190 million over the next three years to implement a chronic disease prevention and management strategy, starting—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Frank Klees: Mrs. Gittens is watching the minister as we speak. She is a pensioner on a fixed income. She had not paid for this equipment at the time that the program was announced by the government. She is in the process of making arrangements with the company supplying this insulin pump to pay for the next five years, and the minister stands in his place and gives me rhetoric.

I am asking the minister to look at this case—and others across the province, no doubt—where for a matter of days he is suggesting that this pensioner should not qualify for what is a very good program, to the credit of this government, announced for the benefit of citizens. Would he take a look at this situation and address Mrs. Gittens's specific circumstances?

Hon. David Caplan: I would encourage the member to forward any information that he has, but he would be aware that the government has announced that we will pay 100% of the cost—\$6,300 for an insulin pump—as well as provide an annual grant to type 1 diabetics in the amount of \$2,400 annually to help to pay for tubing and the supplies that are required in order to manage.

We came into office in 2003 and there was no funding—zero—for insulin pumps for children with diabetes. We extended that, initially, for children and then for over 1,300 adults, we project annually, for type 1 diabetes. We've literally tripled the provincial budget for diabetes programs.

This is what Ellen Malcolmson, president and chief executive officer of the Canadian Diabetes Association, says: "Providing Ontarians with type 1 diabetes the tools—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question.

INFORMATION AND PRIVACY COMMISSIONER

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Minister, you'll know that the privacy commissioner yesterday was before committee in regard to Bill 85. She has very serious concerns in regard to the privacy provisions of this initiative. I put forward a motion asking that the privacy commissioner come back before the committee and take the full time that we need in order to deal with the concerns that she has. Your committee members voted against it, along with the Conservatives. Are you prepared, as minister, to direct the committee to make sure that we take the time to hear what she has to say and get this bill right?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I know that in normal circumstances, the member would not want any cabinet minister to direct the committee to do anything. I have great confidence in you, the members of that committee, to make the best possible decision as to who will appear before the committee and the kind of questioning that will take place. I know that you either put forward that motion or will be doing so. I'm sure that each and every member of the committee, regardless of political affiliation, will give serious and lengthy consideration to the particular requests that you have made to this committee. I found the commissioner's representations to be very helpful, both directly to me in a meeting with me and to the members of the committee, and I certainly urge you to continue to put before the committee that particular—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Minister, I don't accept that because, clearly, you've given committee members direction, and that was not to hear her out for a second time. That's clear in what happened yesterday.

There are serious concerns that the technology you're using inside this legislation is a passive technology that anybody can read with the right receivers. We don't need that information going out and being picked up by people for uses that might, quite frankly, not only be a danger when it comes to privacy information, but put people at risk.

I'm asking you again: Are you prepared to allow the commissioner to come back before us to answer the questions we have in regard to the privacy concerns that we have in this legislation?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I say to the member, I don't have the power to instruct the committee on how it shall operate, nor should I have that power.

I know the great persuasive powers of the member for Timmins, and I know that the compelling arguments that he will advance to the committee will be given full consideration by all members of that committee. In fact, I would say he has leadership qualities—

Interjections.

Hon. James J. Bradley: —that make him, I think, the kind of individual within that committee who can be very persuasive.

I'm happy to hear everything the commissioner has to say. She says that she's very pleased with the co-operation and willing attitude of the Ontario government to work—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

NORTHERN ONTARIO HERITAGE FUND

Mr. Bill Mauro: My question is for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines regarding infrastructure and community investment in aboriginal communities. As the members of the House are well aware, northern Ontario is home to many isolated aboriginal communities. Unfortunately, residents of these communities often have difficulty travelling to other communities, making it difficult to gain year-round access to health care, emergency and other services.

Minister, through your ministry's northern Ontario heritage fund infrastructure and community development program, you offer help to northern communities by making necessary investments to improve critical infrastructure. What recent investment has been made through this program that will benefit isolated aboriginal communities in northern Ontario?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thank you very much for the question, to the member for Thunder Bay—Atikokan. Certainly, we're very pleased that our government's investments in infrastructure and community development are having a very positive impact on aboriginal communities in northern Ontario. In fact, on August 7, our government announced through the heritage fund almost \$1 million to enable the community of Lac Seul First Nation to build a new all-season road. This nine-

kilometre road will link two communities—Whitefish Bay and Kejick Bay—which are currently only accessible by boat in the summer and an ice road in the winter. So building this new all-season road will open up new opportunities for economic development and will benefit the community by providing them with year-round access to health care and emergency services—certainly improving the quality of life.

I'm also happy to report that, since 2003, our government has invested over \$25 million in aboriginal communities through our northern Ontario heritage fund program.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Mauro: Minister, thanks for telling the House about the significant investment that our government has made for the construction of a new all-season road for the Lac Seul First Nation.

By making such an investment in infrastructure, you are indicating that our government is committed to improving quality of life and encouraging more sustainable economies and stronger aboriginal communities in northern Ontario. Building new roads in isolated communities is essential to improving that quality of life for those residents, but in order to maintain a strong community they must have healthy, active residents, and that is obviously very important.

Minister, community centres and multi-use complexes throughout Ontario help in maintaining strong and healthy communities. Unfortunately for the Neskantaga First Nation, in November 2007, they lost their multi-use complex to a fire.

To the minister: I would like to know if our government has made any investment to help Neskantaga rebuild their multi-use complex.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thanks again to the member for Thunder Bay—Atikokan. Certainly, we are committed to improving the lives of our aboriginal communities and continue to make significant investments towards those healthier communities.

On September 25, for example, our government announced that through, again, the northern Ontario heritage fund, we are providing \$1 million to the Neskantaga First Nation to rebuild its multi-use complex. This new facility will provide the community with a venue for social gatherings, feasts, sports activities and other events that are very important to the health and social fabric of this remote community. Also, the multi-use complex will provide office resources to accommodate mineral exploration companies that are working and consulting with the First Nations. Certainly, by accommodating the mineral exploration companies in the complex, it will help continue positive relationships that have the potential to lead to new jobs in the mineral sector for the people of Neskantaga.

1130

SKILLS TRAINING

Mr. John O'Toole: My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, a con-

stituent in my riding of Durham was disappointed to discover that the Second Career program does not cover the retraining of Ontarians who want an AZ licence for driving a truck. My constituent has done her homework and has three potential employers, given that she has this licence. It's my understanding from my constituent that learning to be a professional truck driver isn't covered under the Second Career program because AZ training takes just two months. Apparently, under your Second Career program, courses must be at least six months to qualify. Could you please verify that indeed this is the case and that Ontarians can receive this training which would get them a job in Ontario?

Hon. John Milloy: I appreciate the honourable member's question. I know that he would not want to leave the impression in the House that the Second Career program is the only training program which is available through Employment Ontario. Employment Ontario helps over 900,000 Ontarians every year and offers a variety of training programs. Through our action centres, for example, we helped 53,000 recently laid-off individuals. We have a number of training programs, including the skills development program, which deals with short-term training, as well as Second Career, which deals with long-term training, and we've seen the take-up go forward. It's a matter of giving people an option as to the amount of training that they require. Each individual, of course, would have to come forward and be assessed and work with the Employment Ontario counsellor to find the best options for them.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. John O'Toole: It looks like you've given my constituent the answer of no.

The Ontario truck training association estimates that there are 200,000 people employed directly and indirectly in this business. The association points out that the Canadian census found that the occupation of truck driver is the top occupation amongst Canadians, males and females: 225,000 nationwide. Clearly, this is an employment opportunity for Ontarians. I would urge you to re-examine the qualifications for this to be included in the Second Career program. Could you please take this under advisement and respond to this constituent of mine, giving people a chance for a real job with the training as a truck driver in the province of Ontario?

Hon. John Milloy: I'd certainly be happy to look into any constituent's case that's brought forward, but unfortunately I think the honourable member isn't taking yes for an answer. The simple fact is that the Ontario skills development program, which last year alone had 11,482 people enrolled in it, provides short-term training opportunities including, in many instances, the truck driver training that the honourable member is raising.

The point of Second Career was to add a further option to those who have been laid off, to provide them with long-term training beyond six months and to go forward for a year or two years to go into a second career.

We provide a variety of options through Employment Ontario to people who are unemployed. As I say, I hope

the honourable member would not want to leave the impression in this House that Second Career is the only program that is offered through Employment Ontario, which has a whole menu of choices for Ontarians who are looking for a job.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

M^{me} France G  linas: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Two days ago, Scotland made some bold and positive moves to wrestle down its high rate of death caused by hospital-acquired infections. One of the key measures was to stop the outsourcing of hospital cleaning services and return that important job to public hands. Will the government follow Scotland's lead and stop the contracting out of hospital cleaning services?

Hon. David Caplan: I'd like the member to be aware that we're going to continue with the policy that existed under the NDP government, under the Conservative government and that persists to the present day. Of course, we expect our hospitals to be clean, and there is a legitimate expectation that we're going to be working as hard as we can to meet that expectation. That's why this government has invested \$14.4 billion, a 31% increase in the funds available for our hospitals to be able to provide the array and the range of services that they do. That includes, importantly, cleaning services, which are quite integral to the operation, maintenance and safety in the hospitals.

I will mention more about some of the work that we're doing in hospital-acquired infection and disease control, because, just this afternoon, I will be launching, or participating—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary.

M^{me} France G  linas: St. Joseph's hospital workers from CUPE Local 786 in Hamilton are here today. They launched a job action over the McGuinty government's dangerous belief that it is okay to put hospital cleaning in the hands of the lowest-bidding private company. Scotland privatized hospital cleaning years ago, but they have now acknowledged that it was a fatal mistake, and they are taking concrete action and reversing their decision.

Will the McGuinty government learn and ensure that hospital cleaning in Ontario is done by skilled, experienced and trained public hospital workers?

Hon. David Caplan: Ontarians have the expectation that hospitals will be clean and that the standards will be in place, and in fact, they are. The member tries to create an impression that somehow this government has changed things, but nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, in 1993—you would be familiar, Speaker—at St. Thomas Elgin General Hospital, ancillary services were contracted out under the NDP; Trillium Health Centre in 1994; and Halton Healthcare in 1992.

We've strengthened disease prevention and control in health care institutions, including asking Dr. Michael Baker to be our patient safety lead; public reporting on

eight safety indicators; outbreak reporting for the very first time, making C. difficile outbreaks reportable to our public health units; and a hand hygiene program, which is internationally acclaimed.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for question period has ended. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1137 to 1500.

TEMPERATURE IN CHAMBER

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I wanted to make note to the honourable members that there were some concerns raised this morning about the temperature in the chamber and your wishes have been heard and the heat has been turned on. I would just say to you, though, that now that the heat is on, no complaining that it's too hot. Perhaps this may be an opportunity for everyone to just cool it a little bit in the House, to not raise the temperature too high.

Mr. Peter Kormos: On a point of order, Speaker: New Democrats have seen it as our responsibility to keep the heat on this government from the very first date of their election back in 2003.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister of Government Services.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Many are cold, but few are frozen.

I believe we have unanimous consent—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): One moment. We have introduction of guests.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Welcome to our guests; welcome to Queen's Park today.

SIGN LANGUAGE

Hon. Ted McMeekin: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding sign language interpreters for certain proceedings.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: The motion is that during introduction of visitors, oral questions and deferred votes on Wednesday, October 22, 2008, sign language interpreters may be present on the floor of the chamber to interpret the proceedings to the guests in the galleries.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ORANGEVILLE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Ms. Sylvia Jones: This week, as we are celebrating Ontario Public Library Week, I would like to celebrate

and acknowledge the important work of the Orangeville Public Library for its 100 years of outstanding service to the residents of Dufferin county.

The Orangeville Public Library was built in 1907 with a grant from the Andrew Carnegie Foundation and opened its doors in 1908. Andrew Carnegie, who had made his fortune in the steel business, believed he had a duty to use his wealth for the improvement of mankind and granted funds to communities across North America to help build libraries which would be free for all.

The original Orangeville Carnegie library is an example of classical beaux arts, an architectural style popular for public buildings in the first half of the 20th century. This style relied heavily on elements of Roman and Greek architecture, notably the use of columns. Renovations to the Orangeville Public Library were undertaken as part of the town's centennial project in 1967. In 1988, architect William Woodworth created a design to join the Carnegie library to the original Bank of Commerce building, which also had a beaux arts façade, on the corner of Mill Street and Broadway.

On Friday, October 17, the library held a successful dinner dance to celebrate this 100th anniversary and build the funds for the future. Congratulations to library CEO Cindy Weir and her staff at the Orangeville Public Library for a wonderful evening of celebration and fun. I would also like to acknowledge Cindy Weir as she presides as the 2008 president of the Ontario Public Library Association.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Peter Kormos: On Wednesday, October 15, Port Colborne's Lakeshore Catholic High School filled its auditorium to the rafters with folks from Port Colborne and beyond who were mad as hell that an unelected, unresponsive, undemocratic, unaccountable and anonymous Niagara health services board had attacked hospitals in Fort Erie, Port Colborne and Welland. The folks in Port Colborne weren't going to put up with it. The issue is one of people in that community, like the people in Fort Erie, like the people in Welland, over the course of decades and generations, working hard to build local hospitals, build services in those local hospitals, services as fundamental as emergency rooms, and then having, in the dark of night, the gang of thieves in the form of the NHS steal those services away from them.

Look, these people are appealing to Dr. Kitts and his team to make the right recommendation to the LHIN—oh, that mega LHIN, the one that covers everything from Brantford through Hamilton down into Niagara.

Ernie Eves and Mike Harris gave us forced amalgamation; Dalton McGuinty imposed mega LHINs on us. But I say that at the end of the day, the real solution is to acquire hospital service boards that are elected, that are accountable, that are democratic and that, rather than hide behind LHINs and committees like that of Dr. Kitts, involve the communities that they are working with directly in their consultations.

GO TRANSIT

Mr. Bob Delaney: Commuters in Streetsville will soon benefit from a major upgrade to the Streetsville GO train station. In July, GO Transit began a major project to lengthen the station platform to accommodate the new 12-car GO trains that now serve the Milton line.

As well, GO Transit is making life a little more convenient for those of us who park in that very long parking lot at the Streetsville station. Construction of a new pedestrian tunnel is under way to link the parking lot to the station platform. What that means is that for those of us—and I'm one of those commuters—on the last three morning trains, when parking spaces are near the back of the lot, there will be a shorter hike to get to the station platform. That will not only help many commuters make their train without the sprint we often need to take when traffic is slow, but will assist us with a shorter walk when the weather is cold, when the weather is wet or when the weather is snowy.

The existing station platform is also getting a facelift. Gone are the 1980s vintage interlocking stones with all of their spring thaw puddles and icy patches when the weather is cold or wet.

Residents can get more details on my website at bobbdelaney.com. I will let residents know of the official opening date for the new platform and the new tunnel as soon as the contractor can provide it to us.

L'ORÉAL FASHION WEEK

Mrs. Christine Elliott: It's with great pleasure that I rise today to speak to the House about L'Oréal Fashion Week's 16th season, which will take place October 20 to 25 this year. L'Oréal Fashion Week, produced by the Fashion Design Council of Canada, is taking place at Nathan Phillips Square in Toronto all week.

Founded in 1990 with a specific mandate to brand fashion in Canada, the Fashion Design Council of Canada has successfully created a fashion week that commands respect on an international level. Many of Canada's top fashion designers will be unveiling their spring 2009 collections over a series of 37 runway shows this week. The week also offers the opportunity to bring up-and-coming Canadian designers and their work into the forefront.

Yesterday afternoon, fashion week was kicked off by a presentation of Alfred Sung's new bridal collection, and the event was concluded by a media cocktail reception last night at Holt Renfrew.

Events such as this are crucial to preserving the unique talent and culture we have right here in Canada. Our Canadian designers can fully hold their own on the world stage, and it's important that we take time to recognize and celebrate their talent.

I'm looking forward to attending my first L'Oréal Fashion Week fashion show tomorrow evening and encourage all members to attend, if they're able, to demonstrate our support for our Canadian designers.

CARDIAC CARE

Mr. Bill Mauro: My top priority during the 2003 provincial election campaign was to bring world-class cardiac services to Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre. The provision of angioplasty in Thunder Bay has now reached the one-year mark.

The program has now expanded with the arrival of Dr. Mark Henderson as director of the interventional cardiology program. Dr. Henderson is a leading cardiologist with more than 20 years' experience performing angioplasty. Since his arrival in September, activity has skyrocketed. The percentage of cases performed in Thunder Bay has increased from 40 to 95. Dr. Henderson's arrival translates into more residents accessing more timely service without the need for extensive travel, so that they can remain close to family and friends during medical treatment.

The angio program at Thunder Bay Regional has a world-class facility and an excellent team reputation for cardiac services. Health care professionals, including Drs. Chris Lai and Frank Nigro, have performed more cardiac catheterizations over the past 20 years than any other centre with a diagnostic-only lab. Their success has placed Thunder Bay Regional in a position to offer angioplasty and expand the cardiology program.

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Another encouraging development is that the health sciences foundation, through its northern cardiac fund, has raised over \$1 million to support further enhancements of the angioplasty program. When fully operational, the program will serve over 550 patients yearly and will see the creation of approximately 40 new jobs.

I support and salute the generous businesses, organizations and individuals of Thunder Bay who, in conjunction with our government, share a vision of excellence in cardiac care for the people of northwestern Ontario.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Toby Barrett: I'm angry. People in Ontario are also angry about this government's economic mess. I'll point out that in the last fiscal year, revenues were \$5 billion higher than expected, but instead of saving for a rainy day, members opposite spent every penny.

Premier McGuinty inherited a prosperous province from Mike Harris and Ernie Eves on the heels of the Common Sense economic Revolution, but in 2004, McGuinty introduced the largest tax increase in the history of Ontario and ran up a deficit. Revenues have gone from \$69 billion to a whopping \$97 billion, but this government spends it as quickly as it comes in.

Spending has increased by 40%, to \$96 billion. Why is that? Because this crew thought the good times would last forever. Only David Peterson surpassed McGuinty for an all-time spending record of a 45% increase over five years. Even Bob Rae kept spending to 21%, while Harris and Eves over eight years had increases of just 20%.

This government began with a deficit; they'll go out with a deficit. Don't be surprised if this government brings in a deficit tomorrow.

There we have it: five years of knee-jerk Liberalism jacking up taxes, jacking up spending, and now another McGuinty deficit in the wings.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. David Ramsay: Now for some good news. I'm very pleased to inform the House today of an exciting new manufacturing development taking place in my riding of Timiskaming-Cochrane, specifically in the municipality of West Nipissing.

On June 23 of this year, I attended a sod-turning ceremony that took place in the town of Sturgeon Falls. This was to honour a multinational corporation, Jennmar, out of Pennsylvania, that is investing some \$15 million in the community over the next couple of years. Two 60,000-square-foot facilities are planned that will be home to approximately 150 new jobs. Jennmar produces products for the mining industry for ground control systems, such as bolts, nuts, gears and shafts. Mr. Frank Calandra, Jr., president and CEO of Jennmar, was present at the sod turning and stated, "We are pleased and excited to have the West Nipissing community become the newest member of the Jennmar family."

I would like to congratulate the residents of West Nipissing, Mayor Joanne Savage, her council and the tremendous administration that she has working with her for their hard work and professionalism in attracting this exciting new investment to Sturgeon Falls. Jennmar has recognized the bright future this community has to offer.

The McGuinty government will continue to work with municipalities and businesses to attract more high-paying and skilled jobs to the north. We were able, through the heritage fund, to support the industrial park that supports this, and I expect some further announcements on this in the future.

ISLAMIC HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I'm pleased to rise in the Legislature today to recognize Islamic History Month and the contributions of people of Muslim faith to the progress of our civilization in addition to their contributions to our province and country.

Islamic History Month began last year, and many cities across Canada, including my hometown of Ottawa, have followed the lead of our national Parliament by designating October as the month to recognize Islamic history and the contributions of Muslims to various areas, such as arts, sciences, medicine and music.

The Muslim world has given us many innovations that we take for granted in our modern daily lives. Here are some examples:

The first person to realize that light enters the eye, rather than leaving it, was the 10th-century Muslim mathematician, astronomer and physicist Ibn al-Haitham.

He invented the first pinhole camera after noticing the way light came through a hole in window shutters.

Distillation, the means of separating liquids through differences in their boiling points, was invented around the year 800 by Islam's foremost scientist, Jabir ibn Hayyan, who transformed alchemy, inventing many of the basic processes and apparatus still in use today. Ibn Hayyan emphasized systematic experimentation and was the founder of modern chemistry.

These are a few examples by which Muslim scholars and scientists have contributed to the world today. I encourage all members of this Legislature and Ontarians to take some time this month to learn about the very rich history of Islam.

WALKERTON CLEAN WATER CENTRE

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I rise today to offer congratulations to the residents of Walkerton on the recent ground-breaking for the new Walkerton Clean Water Centre.

This new facility, which will be lead-certified for its commitment to energy efficiency, will increase the centre's capacity to conduct training seminars, information sessions and research that pertains to the safety of our drinking water. The Walkerton Clean Water Centre is a key resource in implementing the recommendations of the O'Connor inquiry and is dedicated to providing hands-on training and learning opportunities for owners and operators of drinking water systems, with a focus on those in remote areas. The centre will continue to be a world-class institute, dedicated to increasing the capacity for research and furthering the knowledge and expertise of the professionals who have the job of providing safe drinking water in this province from source to tap.

We have implemented Justice O'Connor's 121 recommendations. The clean water centre will symbolize excellence in the protection of drinking water, and we will never forget the tragedy that happened in May 2000 in Walkerton. But the clean water centre represents a recognition of that tragedy and the work that has gone on in the community to rebuild. It's a bright future for the community of Walkerton.

ANNUAL REPORT, ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSIONER OF ONTARIO

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that I have today laid upon the table the 2007-08 annual report of the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

SINGLE-USE BOTTLED WATER BAN ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 INTERDISANT LES BOUTEILLES D'EAU JETABLES

Mr. Kular moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 112, An Act to prohibit the sale of single-use plastic bottles of water in Ontario / Projet de loi 112, Loi interdisant la vente de bouteilles d'eau en plastique jetables en Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Kuldip Kular: The purpose of this bill is to encourage public confidence in the water treated and supplied by our municipal water systems and to reduce waste and the consumption of energy associated with the production and recycling of plastic bottles by proposing a province-wide ban on the sale of single-use plastic bottles of water.

DIABETES AWARENESS MONTH ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LE MOIS DE LA SENSIBILISATION AU DIABÈTE

Mrs. Mangat moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 113, An Act to proclaim the month of November Diabetes Awareness Month in Ontario / Projet de loi 113, Loi visant à proclamer le mois de novembre Mois de la sensibilisation au diabète.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: This bill will officially proclaim November as Diabetes Awareness Month in Ontario, in an effort to raise public awareness of diabetes and the steps that can be taken to prevent or manage the disease.

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STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

LOCAL GOVERNMENT WEEK SEMAINE DES ADMINISTRATIONS LOCALES

Hon. Jim Watson: I am pleased to inform the members about an initiative that gives Ontario's children and youth real-life lessons in responsible citizenship.

This week, as many of you may know, is Local Government Week in Ontario. The week gives our grades 5 and 10 students a hands-on introduction to local democracy and the responsibility of citizenship. This is being done through activities such as mock elections and council meetings. For teachers, it is a new opportunity to bring local civics to life in the classroom, and for

municipalities, it provides a forum to educate young people about the importance of the services that local governments provide. They will be able to engage young people and, in turn, young people will learn how they can engage their local councils.

Local Government Week is the result of hard work and support of many different organizations and groups. In particular, I would like to thank the officials in my ministry, in partnership with the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario, AMCTO, and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario.

La Semaine des administrations locales est le résultat du travail acharné et de l'appui de nombreux organismes et groupes. J'aimerais souligner en particulier que mon ministère a conclu un partenariat avec l'Association des directeurs généraux, secrétaires et trésoriers municipaux de l'Ontario et l'Association des municipalités de l'Ontario.

We have consulted with education experts and organizations such as the Ontario Teachers' Federation, who have given valuable input to the program.

Through these collective efforts, schools and municipalities across the province have received local government resource kits with suggestions on activities to make Local Government Week come to life. The manual, if members would like a copy of it and have not seen it, is available through my office. They are excellent pieces of work that are encouraging young people to learn a little bit more about local government. We want the youth of Ontario to learn about the importance of local government and realize that they too can one day become leaders in their own communities.

Yesterday, I had the pleasure of meeting the grade 5 students at Regal Road public school in Toronto. The children had designed flags that captured what they thought of local government and their communities. I want to thank those students. They're wonderful, talented young people who welcomed me, the local city councillor from Toronto and the local school trustee. I was amazed at the students' enthusiasm and hope that this week's events will make them appreciate even more the vital role local government plays in their lives.

I would like to quote the words of the president of the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario, Ray Callery. Mr. Callery is the chief administrative officer of the town of Greater Napanee:

"Teaching young people about responsible citizenship and the value of stewardship for their local communities [is] critical to the long-term vitality and prosperity of Ontario's municipalities. We are pleased to partner with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and AMO to bring Local Government Week to life, and as a celebration of the key role that Ontario local governments play in defining the character, priorities, and physical makeup of our communities."

I quote the words of the new president of AMO, Mr. Peter Hume. He is from the wonderful city of Ottawa.

Peter and I were elected the same year, in 1991, to city council. He said:

"No government touches people more directly than municipal government—particularly when it comes to young people. Local Government Week is a great opportunity to introduce young people to how municipalities work, our responsibilities, and how they can contribute to the future of their communities."

I thank all members of this House, many of whom have served at the municipal level, as I had the pleasure of doing for nine years, for supporting this initiative in their communities. I'd encourage members to go and visit their schools, talk about local government if you've had experience in local government, and share some of your experiences with these young people to encourage them to get involved in municipal government, in leadership in their communities, and some day perhaps as mayor, city councillor or trustee in their community.

ROAD SAFETY

Hon. James J. Bradley: I rise in the House today to tell you about a determined group of young people who are making our roads safer by speaking out against dangerous driving.

Making our roads the safest they can be takes smart laws, tough enforcement and widespread public education. That is something we cannot do alone. And today, I would like to thank the Student Life Education Company for its commitment to keeping our young drivers safe.

Today marks this organization's 10th annual National Students Against Impaired and Distracted Driving Day; that is, NSAIDD. We pronounce that "NSAIDD Day" for short. Across Ontario, students will join over half a million youth nationwide to spread the word about the dangers of driving impaired and distracted. This day of action began almost 10 years ago by a group of high school students who knew that they had a voice and wanted to use it.

Research shows that drivers aged 19 to 21 are over-represented in drinking and driving collisions. Ontario's safety partners are taking action to change this by reaching out to their peers. For nearly 10 years, NSAIDD has been empowering youth to make the right decisions before they get behind the wheel of a car, decisions that might save their lives.

NSAIDD Day is the work of one of our road safety partners that has helped Ontario achieve and maintain one of the safest road networks in North America, year in and year out. The latest statistics show that Ontario has the safest roads of any province or state. The road fatality rate is the lowest in our province's history for the third year in a row.

With the voice of our safety partners, we are carefully examining Ontario's graduated licensing system to find even better ways to protect young drivers. We are looking at new ways to reduce some of the distractions drivers face daily. We are consulting with our road safety

partners and police, and we are reviewing the latest research and best practices from around the world.

Today is National Students Against Impaired and Distracted Driving Day, but every day is road safety day in Ontario.

WASTE REDUCTION WEEK

Hon. John Gerretsen: As you may know, October 19 to 25 marks Waste Reduction Week in Ontario. Yesterday, along with my colleague Minister Wynne, the Minister of Education, I had the pleasure of helping launch Waste Reduction Week along with its mascot this year, Oscar the Grouch. Hundreds of enthusiastic Ontario eco-school students were there. It was very exciting to see literally hundreds of young people, knowledgeable about the three Rs—reuse, reduce and recycle—and being committed to making our province greener and more sustainable.

As we all know, the blue box program started Ontario on the road to a financially sustainable approach to waste diversion some 20 years ago. Industry, municipalities and consumers all shared in its success. This past July we launched a municipal hazardous waste, or special waste, program, an important step to keep household toxic waste out of our landfills, sewers and waterways. Our government's waste electronics program goes even further by capturing old computers, cellphones, televisions and other e-waste, recovering valuable material that can be turned into new products. We have asked for the next phases of these two programs to be developed by Waste Diversion Ontario. We've also asked Waste Diversion Ontario for a program to effectively manage the approximately 12 million used tires generated in Ontario each year.

We are making progress, but much more needs to be done. We are now working on the next steps in the evolution of waste management in Ontario. The highly successful blue box program has exceeded its five-year objective and we need to consider how to best move forward. I have asked Waste Diversion Ontario to engage industry, municipalities and the public in discussing the opportunities to strengthen the blue box program, and I look forward to their recommendations.

We have also recently launched a full-scale review of the Waste Diversion Act. The act has been around since 2002. It has served us well, but it's time to take another look. After five years, we need to see what's working and what's not. This review will take place in the context of a zero waste vision, and we invite individuals and organizations to visit the Ministry of the Environment's website for a full copy of the discussion paper.

1530

Zero waste is about a changing mindset, a changing culture, more than a specific target. As author Thomas Friedman says, "We must eliminate the concept of waste." That means looking at waste in new ways and seeing the opportunities inherent in materials we are accustomed to thinking about as simply plain garbage.

A discussion paper, as I've mentioned before, has also been posted on the environmental registry so that everyone can consider the issues and provide us with much-needed feedback. My ministry will also be holding focused consultation sessions for discussion and input by everyone involved: industry, organizations, and individuals.

What we are proposing is by no means revolutionary or out of reach. In fact, we are simply building on our collective success, particularly when it comes to municipal waste diversion. We have also seen some progress being made by industry, an area where we have much to gain. Certainly more can and must be done by this sector.

The theme of Waste Reduction Week this year says it all: "Too good to waste." We still need to recognize the value of the materials and energy used to make a product, and recapture that value through reuse and recycling. We need to rethink how products are designed, how they are packaged and what to do when they've outlived their original use.

Successful waste diversion also provides opportunities for innovation in green technologies, something we are working hard to encourage. Waste recycling means new investment in processing facilities, more jobs for Ontarians and a shift towards a greener economy. As Ontario moves forward towards a green economy, companies who have incorporated the three Rs approach to doing business will be better equipped to compete in the global marketplace. Many companies have found that by focusing on reducing waste and reusing materials they can reduce costs and boost their bottom line significantly.

During Waste Reduction Week, I encourage everyone to focus on the most important of the three Rs, and that is to reduce. I challenge all Ontario businesses, institutions, industry and individuals to find innovative ways to increase their diversion rates. Our government is committed to going green and making our province more sustainable. By working together, all of us can reduce the amount of waste we produce and build a cleaner, healthier province.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

LOCAL GOVERNMENT WEEK

Mr. John O'Toole: I was convinced that the Minister of Municipal Affairs, in his response to Local Government Week, would have made some commitment here today to deal with the provincial-municipal service structure review. Why isn't he announcing today that he's here to help municipalities during this week? Make the commitment up front, instead of a bunch of high-speaking language that doesn't address a single one of the municipalities' priorities. I'm so disappointed, along with the mayors in my community. I should tell you I will be visiting the schools in my community; I did yesterday and I will two other schools this week. What I'm going to be telling them is that the minister had the opportunity this week to fulfill a promise and tell them that this review has been promised three times and yet he

hasn't delivered it. I'm so disappointed he missed this opportunity again.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Frank Klees: On behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus I want to pay tribute to the more than 25,000 Canadian youth who are members of Canadian Youth Against Impaired Driving. On this 10th anniversary of the National Students Against Impaired and Distracted Driving Day, we celebrate the initiative and responsible leadership of young people who, by their actions, are sending a strong message to their peers that irresponsible and impaired driving injures and kills Canadians of all ages. Their vision affirms that together Canada's youth can empower and inspire all Canadians to face the issue of impaired and distracted driving head on, and promote safe and responsible driving.

The death this past summer of 20-year old Tyler Mulcahy and two friends, the result of a car crash in Muskoka, is a reminder of the importance of reaching young people with this life-saving message.

WASTE REDUCTION WEEK

Mr. Toby Barrett: Welcome to Waste Reduction Week in Ontario, the only province where the waste diversion plan creates more garbage than it diverts. This is a government whose environment minister told us it was committing to a 2005 target of 60% waste diversion. That was at the beginning of the McGuinty term. Later—

Interjection: Did they hit it?

Interjection: How are they doing?

Mr. Toby Barrett: I'm afraid they didn't hit it.

Later, the minister pushed that commitment back to 2008. So how is that target working? We pulled up a StatsCan survey that came out this summer, and it lays out that when it comes to McGuinty waste reduction, regrettably, it's all words and very little action.

That StatsCan survey reveals in a report that the diversion rate now—get this—sits at 18.7%. That's 18.7%; that's a far cry from the 60% diversion rate that the previous minister promised for the year 2005. It's a far cry, Minister.

Ontarians are generating more waste than ever before at a cost of \$870 million to taxpayers each year. Garbage disposal rose from 9.8 million to 10.4 million tonnes. That's an increase of 4%. So while waste generation has increased, Ontario's diversion rate has actually decreased by one percentage point, dropping to 2.3 million tonnes.

Instead of action to reduce waste, we get Oscar the Grouch. We get a supposed plan to deal with batteries—I don't think the minister made mention of that; I strongly agree with that action. But how am I—how are any of us in this House, how is anyone in the province of Ontario—supposed to believe what the minister is saying, given the record? Oscar the Grouch may like to see more trash in the can, but the people of Ontario deserve much better than that.

Today at 1 o'clock in the media studio, Gord Miller, Environmental Commissioner of the province of Ontario, had this to say in his annual report, and some in this House may argue with Gord Miller's recent statement: "Ontario lacks an overarching provincial policy for waste management that would set out capacity needs, technology preferences, goals, targets and timelines." He went on to say that "MOE"—that would be the Ministry of the Environment—"does have a target and an approach on waste diversion, but it has become outdated."

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: On behalf of the New Democratic caucus, I'd like to get up and congratulate the work that has been done by Students Against Impaired and Distracted Driving.

What's interesting here is that over the years, it's gone from the legislators taking the lead to the public being in the lead, and I think, really, this is the point of today. We are blessed with people such as these, MADD and others who have pushed this Legislature and the federal government to deal with this issue, to where drunken driving is not the norm that you used to see on the highways across Ontario.

I say to all those community groups such as this, who work hard in order to keep us on the leading edge: Congratulations, job well done. Continue the good work.

WASTE REDUCTION WEEK

Mr. Peter Tabuns: National Waste Reduction Week aims to raise awareness regarding problems of over-consumption and waste. Canadians produce 31 million tonnes of waste a year, 2.7 kilograms per person per day.

Despite city recycling programs, we still divert less than 25% of the waste we generate. In fact, Toronto Star columnist Christopher Hume recently called Ontario among the worst in the world in reducing waste. So when we celebrate national Waste Reduction Week, we should recognize that we've got a long way to go.

Today's report from the Environmental Commissioner talks about other failings in the environmental direction taken by this government. He indicates we're in the midst of a multi-fold environmental crisis, energy crisis, water crisis and climate change crisis. He emphasizes that we've been lulled into a false sense of security that government is effectively protecting the environment because of all its environmental programs. But the truth, according to the commissioner, is that many of these government programs are simply not working. The low water response plan is not protecting water levels. Weak government regulations allow water bottling companies to pump millions of litres of water from the watershed, practically for free. The air quality index underestimates air quality problems because monitoring stations are placed far from sources of pollution. The Ontario biodiversity strategy is not actually protecting biodiversity.

Waste Reduction Week is a time for all Ontarians to reflect on ways to reduce, reuse and recycle, but it's also

a time for governments, like the government of the Minister of Transportation there, to ask themselves if they're doing enough to protect our shared water, air and land. And given today's report from the Environmental Commissioner, it's clear that's not the case.

1540

LOCAL GOVERNMENT WEEK

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm responding to the Minister of Municipal Affairs in his Local Government Week announcement. He talks in his remarks about lessons and responsible citizenship for young people; I'd say that we have to have lessons in responsible government for the Liberals across the way, who are still not paying their own bills and have downloaded them onto the municipalities.

We have in his remarks a discussion about mock elections; what about talking about Liberal mock promises? Because that's all they ever give, mock promises. In fact, they mock municipalities when they try to talk about anything to do with taking away the downloading.

This government has been absolutely absent in terms of a proper relationship with municipalities. The report that they promised to bring forward on the municipal financial relationship is still not here. Two years later, we still don't know what this government plans on doing in terms of relieving municipalities of bills that don't belong on the property tax base. We're the only jurisdiction in the entire G8 that has social programs on the property tax base—absolutely inappropriate. It is the most regressive level of taxation, it is the most inelastic level of taxation, and yet the Liberals are happy to keep all of these kinds of programs on the property tax base.

What happens as a result? Municipalities can't do the good work that they're supposed to be doing, that this minister wants to tell us he's trying to teach students about—what municipalities should be doing. Well, maybe the minister needs to learn what municipalities should be doing and what they shouldn't be doing. They shouldn't be paying for affordable housing, they shouldn't be paying for Ontario Works, they shouldn't be paying for ODSP and they shouldn't be paying for court security costs. What they should be doing is the business that is the closest to the people. That's the one thing I would agree with, in what the minister said, that the municipal level of government is supposed to provide services that are the closest to the people, services like parks, services like libraries, like recreation centres, good transit systems, good roads. Those are the kinds of things that municipalities should be paying for. But not in Ontario; they can't afford to pay for robust programs in any of those areas. Why? Because they're paying the downloaded costs from the provincial Liberal government that has refused to deal with the mess that the last government left them.

With all due respect, the minister should take his own lessons at this time of Local Government Week.

PETITIONS

EMERGENCY DISPATCH SERVICES

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm receiving hundreds of petitions to do with 911 services in Parry Sound–Muskoka. They read:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is considering relocating emergency ambulance and fire dispatch services currently provided by Muskoka Ambulance Communications Service to the city of Barrie; and

"Whereas up to 40% of all calls received are from cellphones from people unfamiliar with the area; and

"Whereas Parry Sound–Muskoka residents have grave concerns about the effect on emergency response times if dispatch services are provided by dispatchers who are not familiar with the area; and

"Whereas 16 Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care-funded jobs, held by qualified communication officers from local communities, may be lost as a result of the relocation of dispatch services to the city of Barrie,

"Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario put the safety, health and economic concerns of the people of Parry Sound–Muskoka ahead of government efficiency interests and ensure that emergency dispatch services continue to be provided locally by Muskoka Ambulance Communications Service."

I support this petition.

EMISSION-FREE VEHICLES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I have 1,500 signatures collected by Barry Taylor and the listeners of 102.1 the Edge, which is a local radio station, and it reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas gasoline-powered vehicles are a major source of pollution; and

"Whereas the electric Zenn car, a Canadian innovation, is barred from road use in Ontario but is legal for use in other provinces; and

"Whereas electric bicycles and scooters that comply with the Transport Canada 2001 design standards are the subject of a pilot program in Ontario, but the McGuinty government changed the rules halfway through the trial and the status of these bicycles for legal road use in Ontario is now unclear and uncertain; and

"Whereas consumers want to do the right thing by the environment and invest in emission-free vehicles like electric cars and electric bicycles and scooters, and there is a strong consumer push to have the McGuinty government approve these vehicles for legal use on Ontario roads, with the exception of major highways and roads with speed limits exceeding 50 kilometres per hour; and

"Whereas government delays and uncertainty are putting a chill on the development of green transportation options and the purchase of electric cars and bikes in Ontario;

"Therefore we, the undersigned petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to move immediately to approve electric cars like the ZENN car and electric bicycles for legal use on Ontario roadways, with the exception of 400-series highways and roads where speed limits exceed 50 kilometres an hour."

I agree with this petition, I've signed it and I send it to the table by way of page Helen.

LUPUS

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm pleased to introduce this petition on behalf of the Lupus Foundation of Ontario. I have thousands of signatures from across Ontario. I also want to recognize Kathy Crowhurst from the foundation office in Ridgeway. This is a disease that's known as the disease with 1,000 faces. The petition reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas systemic lupus erythematosus is unrecognized as a global health problem by public health professionals and governments, driving the need for greater awareness; and

"Whereas medical research on lupus and efforts to develop safer and more effective therapies for the disease are underfunded in comparison with diseases of other comparable magnitude and severity; and

"Whereas no safe and effective drugs for lupus have been introduced in more than 40 years. Current drugs for lupus are very toxic and can cause other life-threatening health problems that can be worse than the primary disease;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to assist financially with media campaigns to bring about knowledge of systemic lupus erythematosus and the signs and symptoms of this disease to all citizens of Ontario.

"We further petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide funding for research currently being undertaken in lupus clinics throughout Ontario."

I'm pleased to sign my name to these petitions and give them to the page to bring them to the table.

SEXUAL REASSIGNMENT SURGERY

Mr. Jim Wilson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the previous Progressive Conservative government determined sex change operations were not a medical spending priority and instead chose to invest in essential health care services; and

"Whereas Premier McGuinty said in 2004 that funding for sex change operations was not a priority of his government; and

"Whereas the current Liberal government has eliminated and reduced OHIP coverage for chiropractic, optometry and physiotherapy services; and

"Whereas the present shortage of doctors and nurses, troubling wait times for emergency services and other treatment, operational challenges at many hospitals, as well as a crisis in our long-term-care homes signify that the current government has not met their health care commitments;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario does not fund sex change operations under OHIP and instead concentrates its priorities on essential health services and directs our health care resources to improve patient care for all Ontarians."

I agree with the petition and I've signed it.

TUITION

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition from Local 30, the student general association at Laurentian University, to "Drop Tuition Fees and Increase Funding for Post-Secondary Education....

"Whereas undergraduate tuition fees in Ontario have increased by 195% since 1990 and are the third-highest in all of the provinces in Canada; and

"Whereas average student debt in Ontario has skyrocketed by 250% in the last 15 years to over \$25,000 for four years of study; and

"Whereas international students pay three to four times more for the same education, and domestic students in professional programs such as law or medicine pay as much ... as \$20,000 per year; and

"Whereas 70% of new jobs require post-secondary education, and fees reduce the opportunity for many low- and middle-income families while magnifying barriers for aboriginal, rural, racialized and other marginalized students; and

"Whereas Ontario currently provides the lowest per capita funding for post-secondary education in Canada, while many countries fully fund higher education and charge little or no fees for college and university; and

"Whereas public opinion polls show that nearly three quarters of Ontarians think the government's Reaching Higher framework for tuition fee increases of 20% to 36% over four years is unfair;...."

Therefore, they petition this assembly to introduce a framework that:

"(1) Reduces tuition and ancillary fees annually for students.

"(2) Converts a portion of every student loan into a grant.

"(3) Increases per student funding above the national average."

I fully support this petition and will affix my name to it and send it to the clerks' table with Laura.

1550

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition from a number of constituents from my riding and it reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents;

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

As I agree with this petition, I shall sign it and send it to the clerks' table.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a pleasure to read a petition on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Freeze Gas Prices,

"Whereas high gasoline prices recently now aren't affordable for the average person; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government's tax on a litre of gasoline is 14.7 cents; and

"Whereas the federal government's tax on a litre of gasoline is 10 cents plus the GST;

"Therefore, we the undersigned hereby petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

"(1) That the McGuinty government immediately freeze gas prices for a temporary period until world prices moderate.

"(2) That the McGuinty government and the federal government immediately lower or eliminate their tax on

gas for a temporary period until world oil prices moderate.

"(3) That the McGuinty government immediately initiate a royal commission to investigate the predatory gas prices charged by oil companies operating in Ontario."

I'm pleased to sign this on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham and give it to one of the new pages, Jenna.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Joe Dickson: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Rouge Valley Health board reversed the 2006 announcement closing the maternity and pediatric services at the Ajax-Pickering hospital due to an overwhelming public outcry; and

"Whereas the Rouge Valley Health board of directors has recently approved closing the 20-bed mental health unit at the Ajax-Pickering hospital; and

"Whereas there remains further concern by residents for future maternity/pediatric closings, particularly with the new birthing unit at Centenary hospital, which will see 16 new labour, delivery, recovery and postpartum (LDRP) birthing rooms and an additional 21 postpartum rooms opening this fall in 2008, even with the Ontario Ministry of Health's largest-ever expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital; and

"Whereas there is a natural boundary, the Rouge Valley, that clearly separates the two distinct areas of Scarborough and Durham region;

"We, the undersigned, therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Central East Local Health Integration Network (CE-LHIN) and the Rouge Valley Health System (RVHS) board of directors review the Rouge Valley Health System makeup and group Scarborough Centenary hospital with the three other Scarborough hospitals; and

"Further, that we position Ajax-Pickering hospital within Lakeridge Health, thus combining all of our hospitals in Durham region under one Durham region administration."

I shall affix my signature to this and pass it to Elise.

LOGGING ROUTE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with logging trucks going through the village of Restoule and it reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Nipissing forest management plan proposes to use Hawthorne Drive in Restoule, which features a single-lane bridge and narrow and steep sections; and

"Whereas area residents have grave concerns about community safety, traffic speed, truck noise and general wear and tear of Hawthorne Drive and the bridge in the village of Restoule; and

"Whereas the proposed route travels past the Restoule Canadian Legion and two churches; and

"Whereas alternative routes are possible via Odorizzi Road and Block 09-056;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario put the safety and concerns of the people of Restoule ahead of logging interests and ensure an alternate route is selected for the Nipissing forest management plan."

I support this petition.

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL POLICIES

Mr. Bill Mauro: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

"Whereas the federal government gives more support for economic development, health care and infrastructure to other parts of Canada, and unemployed workers in Ontario get less employment insurance support than in other parts of Canada;

"Whereas the federal system of taxes and equalization extracts over \$20 billion from the people of Ontario every year above and beyond what Ottawa invests in Ontario;

"Whereas laid-off workers in Ontario get \$4,630 less in employment insurance than they would get if they lived in another part of Canada;

"Whereas federal health care money is supposed to be divided equally among all Canadians, but right now Ontario residents are shortchanged by \$773 million per year;

"Whereas the federal government provides economic development support for people living in the north, Atlantic Canada, Quebec and the west, but provides no economic development support for southern Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to demand that the federal government stop gouging the people of Ontario and treat them fairly."

I support this petition and will put my signature to it.

SEXUAL REASSIGNMENT SURGERY

Mr. John O'Toole: I pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham, which reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the previous Progressive Conservative government determined sex change operations were not a medical spending priority and instead chose to invest in essential health care services; and

"Whereas Premier McGuinty said in 2004 that funding for sex change operations was not a priority of his government; and

"Whereas the current Liberal government has eliminated and reduced OHIP coverage for chiropractic, optometry and physiotherapy services; and

"Whereas the present shortage of doctors and nurses, troubling waiting times for emergency services and other treatment, operational challenges at many hospitals, as well as a crisis in our long-term-care homes signify the current government has not met their health care commitments;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario," under Dalton McGuinty, "does not fund sex change operations under OHIP and instead concentrates its priorities on essential health services and directs our health care resources" to improve all patient outcomes for the province of Ontario.

I'm pleased to present this to Jake, one of the new pages here at Queen's Park.

OPPOSITION DAY

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I move that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario calls upon the Ontario government to establish a select committee on the Ontario economy to consider and report on options to address the challenges faced by Ontario families and businesses in the province's current weakened economy.

The terms of reference for this select committee shall be as follows:

The committee shall, among other matters, review the government's current five-point economic plan and the proposals raised by members of this House during debate on the government motion on the economy tabled October 7, 2008. It shall make recommendations on specific measures to be undertaken by the government in the short term to address Ontario's most immediate and pressing challenges, as well as recommendations for a long-range, multi-year economic recovery plan.

The committee shall be empowered to invite witnesses to appear before it as it deems necessary.

The committee shall be non-partisan in makeup, being composed of five government members, three members of the official opposition, and two members of the third party. It shall be chaired by a government member, and a member of the official opposition shall serve as Vice-Chair. The membership of the committee, including the identification of the Chair and Vice-Chair, shall be filed with the Clerk of the Assembly by the whips of the recognized parties no later than October 31, 2008.

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The committee shall have the authority to meet concurrently with the House and during any adjournment of the House, notwithstanding prorogation.

The committee shall have the authority to commission reports relevant to the terms of reference, and to travel within Ontario if the committee deems travel to be necessary.

The committee shall present an interim report with recommendations on immediate measures to be undertaken by the government no later than December 11, 2008, and the committee shall present its final report to the Legislative Assembly no later than March 15, 2009. If the House is not sitting, the committee has the authority to release any report by depositing a copy of it with the Clerk of the Assembly, and, upon resumption of the sittings of the House, the Chair of the committee shall present such report to the House in accordance with the standing orders.

This is addressed to the Premier of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Runciman has moved opposition day number 2. Mr. Runciman.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I'm proud to speak to this motion because it reflects what should be the ideals of this Legislature in our political process. It's a proposal that is not designed to score political points. It is not an empty or meaningless public relations exercise. Instead, we are proposing to do what the people of Ontario often tell us, as politicians, that we should be doing: working together, putting politics aside, and focusing on the issues that really matter to Ontarians. Our motion does all of those things. It reflects the understanding that Ontario's economy is in deep, deep trouble, that the pain of our decline is being felt in living rooms and boardrooms across Ontario, and that, of all possible issues, this is one where public servants like us need to drop the buttons and flags and get on with the job.

It's awfully tempting to take this opportunity to compare our motion to the government's motion for the debate on the economy. It's such a stark difference between self-promotion and co-operation, between the meaningless and meaningful. But as I said, we're here to put forward a true invitation to a non-partisan exercise, so I will call off my inner attack dog and try to keep this as neutral as possible.

Let me begin by pointing out why we need a select committee like the one we are proposing: first and most obviously, because of the depth of our economic crisis. Ontario has gone from first to last in Canada in economic growth. The leading economists say our economy has completely stalled, and we'll be the only province with zero economic growth this year. The price of that is being paid by families, entrepreneurs and communities across the province as they lose jobs and too often lose hope.

The second reason we need this committee is that the government's current economic plan is clearly a failure. Again, I'm not trying to take a partisan shot here, but anyone who tries to stand up today and say that this government's plan is working, that Ontario is doing as well as it could be right now, that a new plan is not required, had better be joking, because nobody could possibly take it seriously. The government itself has admitted that their finances have completely gone off the rails. They're already talking about running a deficit, if not in this place, outside and in Montreal, and cutting back on funding for municipalities. They've gone from a \$5.6-billion surplus just a few months ago to setting the

stage for a deficit. Only in April, the Minister of Finance was saying, "We're on track for the next three years for a balanced budget." Just four weeks ago, September 18, the minister was saying, "Our budget numbers remain on track."

We all agree that there have been huge dislocations in the stock market and the global economy, but nobody told you to spend that huge surplus, just like you did with every other surplus you've enjoyed in the last few years of this economic boom. You had your chance. You had more than enough money. You had more than enough warning from us and others that difficult times were coming.

This didn't just happen in the past few weeks. As the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, John Tory, said earlier today, the current global crisis did not cause Ontario's decline; it only exposed our weaknesses. It was Ontario's overspending, overtaxing, overregulating decisions that weakened our economy, drove away the jobs and left us in this weakened state. The unvarnished, non-partisan reality is that this government's taxing, spending and regulatory initiatives over the past five years have placed this province in a highly vulnerable position. Everyone with a modicum of sense has to admit that we need a new direction and a new plan, and that's the second reason for a select committee.

The third reason is that without a targeted task force like this, Ontario will not get the best plan possible and may not get a new plan in time. The government's idea that the Standing Committee on Finance can produce a new and different plan is a non-starter. They say that Einstein had a definition for insanity: "doing the same thing the same way but expecting a different result." I don't think it's reasonable or realistic to turn to the same people who dug the hole and expect them to dig us out of it again. The standing committee is dominated by government members, and let's be honest here: Their first priority is to protect the best interests of their government and their political party.

Look what we've seen with other standing committees. Just recently, we proposed nearly 70 amendments to Bill 77. That was a bill dealing with the provision of services for persons with developmental disabilities. They were not partisan amendments. They were changes proposed by parents and other stakeholders designed to strengthen the bill and help Ontarians with disabilities and their families. Yet this government could not bring itself to support one single amendment. So the idea that the finance committee will suddenly turn into a focused, non-partisan body that will truly listen and consult is ridiculous and, for those of us who know how this place operates, downright offensive.

We also can't expect it to move swiftly and act decisively. It's a government committee. They're supposed to crawl along and produce lots of paper without upsetting the status quo. But today we're dealing with an urgent matter. We can't afford to put our package on the Titanic and hope it reaches its destination. We need to put it on a speedboat, and that's what this committee

could be, a fast vessel with a single purpose and a single focus. You don't use a hammer to drive home a screw; you don't use a flame thrower to start your barbecue. You use the right tool for the job, and that's what our proposal provides.

Let me conclude by appealing to the government members for their support of this motion, for a couple of reasons: first, because this is just the kind thing that the Premier has said repeatedly in recent days that he wants to do. It was his explanation for the debate on the government's resolution on the economy. It's the idea that getting the best solution to a truly complex problem requires true consultation. To the Premier's credit, he has said that he really wants to hear what the opposition has to say and to incorporate new ideas going forward. That was the right thing to say, and our motion today is the right way to prove that the Premier meant those fine words when he said them.

Finally, let me appeal to the honourable members opposite on these simple grounds: We have to do this. It's too important, too urgent, too much of a challenge to our province and our future to play games with. These are families out there who have lost everything: jobs, savings, homes. There are elderly people whose retirement funds have been wiped out. There are entrepreneurs whose dreams are dying and taking jobs with them.

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The pain is real, it's urgent, and we are not helpless. Ontario is not just some twig being carried downstream by the river. We have some control. We have choices to make, and there are actions we can take to ease that pain and put Ontario back on the path to prosperity in the future.

So I ask all members, don't let this opportunity pass by. Don't miss the chance to be able to say that, just this once, when it really mattered, we dropped the knives, cooled the rhetoric and did the right thing, because years from now, when people look back at this economic crisis, they won't remember the people who played the games of politics successfully. They will remember those who knew that the time for games was over and the time for real constructive work had arrived.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Further debate?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I'm delighted to join in the debate on the opposition day motion.

Let me start by saying that in spite of the Leader of the Opposition's comments in the House that the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs is not the right vehicle by which to address matters of concern on the economy or other matters referred to it by this Legislature, quite frankly, that's exactly the place where matters of the economy and legislation should be directed, and not to a select committee that would have virtually the same responsibilities as outlined in the motion, one referred to by the member opposite, the in-House Leader of the Opposition, as a non-partisan committee, one that presumably, on his words, would act in a fashion—and his party, as the official opposition, in a manner—of co-operation and positive input.

Let me just comment, if I could, on a few of the words. I only put down a couple, kind of the themes that came out of those first few minutes. I heard things like “meaningless” exercises, “self-promotion,” the government's current plan being a “failure.” “Tax and spend,” “regulatory environment,” “offensive,” “ridiculous,” “the Titanic”: Those are not the kinds of words that would lead one to think that a committee other than the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs would be functional in this Legislature.

Let me point out, if I can, the proposed makeup of the committee as it reflects on the current standing committee. The current standing committee has six members of the government. The opposition would have the government have five members on the standing committee. Now, to some that doesn't seem to make a lot of difference. The current makeup has two members of the opposition on the standing committee. The member opposite would increase that to three members. Well, that doesn't seem to be substantive. The current standing committee has one member of the third party. This motion would have a standing committee with two members of the third party. Now, individually, those numbers would not seem to be a big deviation from what currently exists.

The motion also calls for a member of the government to be the Chair. Now, for those who have been in any governance model, and this one in particular, the Chair only has a vote in the case of a tie. Now, without getting into charting it, one only has to add the numbers up to figure out that the government, in effect, would be sitting on a committee as though it were the opposition. It is the role of the official opposition and the third party to oppose government policies, to hold government to account. That's their role. Effectively, this model would put the government in a position that they would be acting as though they were the opposition.

The public in this province a year ago didn't elect our government to a large majority to have us behave and act as though we were in opposition. They elected us to behave and act as a majority government, and that's a majority government that listens carefully to the opposition. It listens to the criticisms. It listens to their efforts and need to hold government to account. It takes those matters into consideration. It's why we're having the debate that we're having today, or have had in the past days and continue to have, on the leader's motion on the economy. The motion as put forward speaks to matters of travel, if need be outside of Toronto. That's what the standing committee does at least annually as we do our pre-budget consultations as an all-party committee of this Legislature.

This is just a small list during my time—and it hasn't been as long, certainly, as some—of some of the communities over the past couple of years, three years, that I've had the opportunity to travel to with members of that committee, including members opposite from both of the parties, to hear from Ontarians across this province. We have travelled to places like Atikokan, Windsor, Timmins, Kitchener, Cornwall, Kenora, Thunder Bay,

Sarnia, I think it was Niagara Falls or St. Catharines in the Niagara area, Barrie and Guelph, and spent much time in Toronto, where there are many people and those can travel here.

We have covered the breadth and width of this province to hear from organizations and individuals about what they see as the need for engagement in the process of developing an annual budget and supporting their positions on the go-forward policies of the financial capacity of the province. The budget and the plans of government are the means by which the people of Ontario have the chance to speak to us about their concerns, about the worrisome nature of today's economy and about their priorities as they see it in government.

The motion that we have before us today is not non-partisan, "Let's get together in a room, let's all hold hands and play nice." That's not the motion. We need to continue to function in this Legislature in the manner in which the public elected us: That's for opposition to hold the government to account; that's for opposition to challenge the positions that government puts forward; that's for an opportunity for the media to report on those matters that the opposition brings forward; that's for a chance for the public to read about that or see it. It's an opportunity for the government, through its ministers and its Premier, to support, defend, consider, modify and amend the positions that the government has on a variety of matters, most particularly matters related to the economy.

I look forward to tomorrow, with the fall economic statement by the Minister of Finance. I look forward to him providing a thorough and formal update on the current status of our economic climate here in the province and on the current status of the books of the province of Ontario. I look forward to the opportunity, should that matter be referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, to serving with all those on the committee on all sides of the House. I look forward to our pre-budget consultations, and we'll be setting out the strategy for that as soon as we can, to find out those communities who need and want to hear from us most particularly this year, as well as opportunities here in Toronto for those who can get to us. We're anxious to get that schedule in place so we have that opportunity so that we can report to the minister and so that he can consider the matters we hear in the development and presentation his budget.

It truly is a pleasure to be able to serve on the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. I've had the opportunity to serve with the member opposite from—I always miss the ridings, they change; if I can just find it—Niagara West—Glanbrook, who has had the lead from the opposition. He is not the only member. I see the member here today from Haldimand—Norfolk, who is an active member from the opposition; the member from Beaches—East York, who is the finance critic for the third party; as well as members who come and go from committee as the need arises to schedule, as well as members from our own side who have served on that committee.

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I look forward to that opportunity yet again in the next few weeks, in the next couple of months, as we deliberate, as we hear from the people of Ontario and what they see as their priorities, their concerns, the worrisome nature of our economy, and the opportunity to bring those matters back here through the committee for the consideration of the minister and the discussion that will occur at that time in the context of the budget, but more urgently, in the context of our debate that will occur shortly—not today, but shortly—on the fall economic statement.

I will not be supporting the opposition day motion. The select committee as proposed will do nothing more for us than our standing committee can do most effectively and do it in a fashion that reflects on the choices the public made in the election of a majority government a year ago.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Frank Klees: I want to begin my remarks by quoting a former Ontario assistant deputy minister of finance, Michael Mendelson. Now a senior scholar at the Caledon Institute of Social Policy, he offers this advice in a contributing article to the *Toronto Star*. I pass it along to colleagues as we deliberate on how we as a province can best prepare for and deal with the current economic challenges.

"Canada is headed into stormy economic times. Our governments seem determined to navigate these waters with their eyes closed. We need instead to face reality right now and start realistic planning for the seemingly inevitable moment when the fiscal dam bursts."

Mr. Mendelson gives us wise advice when he exhorts government to do two things: first, face reality; and second, start realistic planning. While this advice seems rather basic, I suggest that Mr. Mendelson's many years in government taught him that neither of those two things comes easily to government. Perhaps that's because governments of all political stripes are often more focused on spinning public opinion and shaping their performance as a perception rather than on the task of managing the affairs of government and being accountable to the people who elected them. In fact, the staging of the special debate on the economy in this place is an unfortunate example of how even the proceedings of this Legislature can be manipulated to serve the crass public relations objectives of the government.

You see, in response to the tabling of a carefully crafted and self-serving government motion, members of this House are being asked by the Premier to provide input into the government's economic plan for the province, and yet the Premier and the Minister of Finance rejected out of hand the very first proposal made by the official opposition. That proposal is to strike a select committee, structured on a non-partisan basis, for the purpose of reviewing the recommendations brought forward by the members in the course of this debate and that the committee be mandated and resourced to develop an action plan for Ontario's economy.

An important aspect of the committee's responsibility would be to solicit public input by hosting hearings in communities across the province where job losses and the economic crisis are having the most direct impact. Taking the hearings to communities now is imperative if, as the finance minister claims, he "looks forward to the input of the people of Ontario." In fact, it's the only way to get a realistic understanding of the challenges that individual families and businesses are facing, and it's the only way, I suggest, that we can cut through the government's rhetoric whenever we ask about job losses and business closures in communities across the province, because the briefing book responses are always the same, whether they come from the Premier or the Minister of Finance, simply these, and we hear them every day: "Thousands of new jobs have been created." "Retraining programs are in place." "Grant and loan guarantee programs are available."

These are all 30,000-foot-level responses to questions that deal with street level hardships being experienced across the province in every community. Those general responses do absolutely nothing for the factory worker who is unemployed; they do nothing for the family that's facing eviction; and they do nothing for the company that's waiting for the cash to arrive from one of this government's much heralded programs that promise support, but rather than a lifeline, are strangled by red tape and bureaucracy and more and more promises of help that never come. That's why we're calling for a non-partisan select committee. It will force the government to open its eyes to the reality and the extent of the problem. It will give us a realistic sense of the needs and the priorities and will ensure that the Legislature and, through it, the government get the best possible advice for a meaningful and practical action plan for Ontario's economy.

This is nothing new. We had a similar select committee in this Legislature. It was called the select committee on alternative fuels. It was structured in a non-partisan way. It did very important and practical work, and it served to form the basis of solid government policy. So I would call on the government to do what we are calling for as the official opposition: Put partisanship aside and help the Premier legitimize his call for input from the opposition. But if the Premier doesn't want to listen to his colleagues in this House on this issue, perhaps he'll consider the call for a select committee from another source.

Yesterday's Toronto Star editorial, under the heading "MPPs and the Economy," had this to say in response to the Premier's claim that the annual prebudget consultation with the Standing Committee on Finance is all that's needed: "Those consultations—a parade of special interest groups arguing for tax breaks or spending increases in the spring budget—hardly amount to the kind of long-term, comprehensive examination of the province's economic future that is needed." The editorial goes on to say that the idea of a non-partisan standing committee is a good one and, "Under the current circum-

stances, the government should not dismiss it so cavalierly."

We are experiencing troubling times. We will hear from the Minister of Finance tomorrow just how deep that trouble is. If, for once, this Premier and this government would set aside the partisan focus that they continue to have and listen to the official opposition and form a non-partisan select committee and demonstrate to the people of this province that they are serious about consulting, they are serious about setting a new path for the future of Ontario, to put Ontario on a solid path, they will do that. If the Premier has any respect at all for this place and for members of the Legislature, he will strike that non-partisan committee and will get on with doing the work.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Prue: I rise today to speak to what I think is a very important motion and what, in fact, could be a turning point in the life of this Legislature. I listened today while a question was asked by a Liberal backbencher, the member for Oakville and, in all sincerity, when he questioned his minister, he talked about how young people do not understand the partisan nature of this House. Within the time frame that was allowed him, a minute or so, he talked about how we need to deal with politics in a bipartisan or tri-partisan way that should be very, very different and that can really make things happen. When he sat down, he got the usual answer from the minister, one that I think was expected, as in most government questions, but he stood up again and he again pushed the view that this House and this ministry and this government should be seeking to reconcile with all sides of the House on issues of fundamental importance.

I don't know how to tell the members opposite, especially my colleague and the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, the member for Pickering-Scarborough East, but I think the time has come in this House, on this issue, to put down the gloves. I think the time has come in this House to seriously look at having an all-party select committee to look at one of the fundamental issues that is hitting this province, hitting this country and perhaps may affect the entire world.

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I looked at the terms of reference, and I must state that the member from Pickering-Scarborough East was correct: Some of the language used by the mover of the motion was emotive. Some of it did use phrases and suggestions that would not garner a feeling of camaraderie. But put those aside for a moment and look at the body of the motion and what is intended to happen.

The motion suggests that we first strike an all-party select committee. The first thing it contains is that the first item that would be looked at is the government's five-point plan, whether that five-point plan is bearing the fruit it should be bearing if it is in fact going to protect jobs, if it is in fact going to move the economy forward, if it is in fact going to position Ontario for the

21st century and for the new economies and the new jobs. It sets out fundamentally and persuasively in the first couple of lines that that is the first job of the all-party select committee.

It then says that we need to look at both the opposition and the third party amendments that have been filed in this House in accordance with that plan, which was debated last week and continues to be debated this week, and that we look at what some of the recommendations are that are being made and whether they fit into the fabric and rubric of the province of Ontario, our economy and where we need to take it.

It seems to me to be very much in line with what the Premier has said during answers in question period, that he wants to look at the best ideas from all sides of the House. It seems to me that we need do that and that's all that is being suggested.

It goes on to talk about the short-term recommendations that need to be looked at: how to get the Ontario economy moving, how we need to protect the jobs, how we need to do something about the 230,000 jobs that have been lost in this province in the last couple of years. It talks about the short-term solutions that an all-party select committee would need to explore. Then it goes on to talk even more fundamentally about long-term solutions.

It is quite apparent to those who are watching world-wide markets that the economic climate, the economic fabric of the world, is starting to unravel. This has happened before; this is not unique to the year 2008. This happened in the 1970s, the 1950s, the 1930s, and back in the 1890s. It happened at the time of the Industrial Revolution. In fact, if you go back far enough, it started with the agricultural revolution first of all, because as economies change, as conditions change fundamentally, so do the structures that support them.

I think we need to look very strongly and very hard in the long term at where we position Ontario when this financial crisis subsides. When the markets recover, where do we expect Ontario to be? Do we expect to have a huge manufacturing sector? Is the automobile still going to be king? Are we going to look to technologies of change? Are we going to look at green technologies that have taken off in many parts of the world? Where is Ontario going to be? I think that this committee, if set up, would be a mechanism to look at that.

Much was said by my friend the member from Pickering-Scarborough East about this not being a non-partisan committee because the structure of the committee would change. He correctly pointed out that I have been a member of the finance committee now for a number of years. I have travelled the length and breadth of this province with him and other members, Liberals and Conservatives. I'm always the lone New Democrat. It seems that I'm always the one who goes there and tries very patiently to listen to what is said and tries very patiently to make key recommendations to the committee, who in turn forward them to the minister in time for the budget each and every year. We travel, we listen

and we do, I think, good work. I would agree with the member that we do do that good work, but let us not forget that that committee is a partisan committee. That committee has been set up on purpose with a majority of Liberal members. It has five Liberal members and a Chair who is a Liberal as well. The opposition has a combined total of three members, being two Conservatives and one New Democrat. The committee is set up to make sure that the government has the weight to push forward the issues that it wants to push forward. The government has that legal role and mandate because the people in Ontario, in their wisdom, elected 72 Liberals, they elected 24 Conservatives—now 23—and they elected 10 New Democrats. We now currently have one independent member. That's what the people in their wisdom did. I can't turn that around, nor should I want to turn that around. That is the reality, and that is how the committee is set up in that way: in order that the Liberals have an opportunity to make the finance recommendations that they wish. They are the government and they have that authority.

What is being recommended here is fundamentally different. What is being recommended here is that we try to do something which this House has not been very successful in doing, at least not in the seven years plus that I have been here, and that is to act in a non-partisan way to confront the enormity of the situation that is happening here in Ontario, and it is an enormous situation that is happening—230,000 jobs lost, communities devastated, the forestry industry not being able to keep the jobs going, whole towns going out of business, families suffering, the downturn in the United States, and the economic downturn in other places.

I even read today that the downturn has started to affect China, that powerhouse. It is starting to affect them. We have seen banks fail in Ireland. We have seen them fail in Iceland. We have even seen the Dutch ING needing billions of dollars of subsidies. We have subsidies being proposed federally, here in Canada, to help the big banks. This is a huge phenomenon that is upon us.

Do we or should we be partisan, as the member suggests? Should we continue to just have the finance committee travel around with a majority of Liberal members to do whatever they want, or do the people expect us to do something different? I would suggest that the member from Oakville hit on it today when he said that young people expect us to do something different. I certainly know that when I went out to talk to a high school group last week just before the election—I was there on Friday at East York Collegiate Institute with a group of grade 10 individuals who are studying politics. I went there to talk to them about the parties and the election structure and what it was like to work here in the Legislature, what they could see in the federal elections and what to expect. I also described in some detail my lengthy period in municipal government, both in East York and the city of Toronto.

The questions they asked me over and over were incredulous questions about how and why we did not get

along in this House, how and why there was one side over there that seems to ignore this side over here, or the side over here that would taunt the government side over there, and why we acted like that; why we didn't all work together for the common good. That's a hard question to answer sometimes. I know that the cut and thrust of debate here is entrusted to all of us and I know that we are partisan individuals and we represent different parties and come from different parts of the province, but fundamentally I believe that all of us have a duty to the people of this province—and, through this province, to the people of the country, because we are the economic engine—to work together to solve this problem.

I am supporting this motion because I do believe in bipartisanship. I do believe that people of goodwill can get together and work together and do something, and that we have that obligation to do it. We need to put down the gloves. We need to see how we can work together. We need to make recommendations. In the end, this is a bipartisan committee to make recommendations to the government. It doesn't matter what is passed or how it's passed; the government, in the end, has to use its best judgment and has to determine whether or not they are going to proceed with it.

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I have had the opportunity, as a few members of this House did have, including my learned colleague from Pickering-Scarborough East, to be on, I think, the only other committee that was struck similar to what is being suggested here. That had to do with the committee to discuss electoral reform. We went across this country; we even made a trip briefly to Germany and to Scotland to study their electoral systems. We came back and we made recommendations. Those were not binding recommendations on the government of the day. It was merely that the all-party committee came to a consensus on what needed to be done and gave their best advice. The advice was given.

The government took that advice and changed certain aspects of what we had to say. I remember we recommended forcefully in that case that there be a 50%-plus-one plurality in order to make changes. The government changed that. They changed to it a 60% plurality. That certainly made me angry, but I understand they had the legal authority to do that, and they did it. I understand that other suggestions we made they proceeded with. They set up the citizens' committee. We gave them the advice, we gave them our best knowledge and our best expertise, and the committee itself was then disbanded.

That's what's being suggested here. Do we have a select committee which is non-partisan, which can give the best advice possible to the minister and to the government, or do we continue to have a partisan committee that will travel the province in December and January and possibly February and listen to deputations?

There's another fundamental difference between the two committees: The select committee can call its own witnesses. I know the Standing Committee on Finance can do that as well, but generally it is driven by people

who come before the committee who offer to make deputations, and we hear the number that we can hear. We don't hear them all but we hear those that want to come forward.

Generally they fall into two groups. There is the group that is advocating for change, that wants to see changes in the legislation. Then there is the group that is advocating for additional monies, and a lot of these are the social welfare groups and others who come forward looking for money for any range of prospects, from autism to finances to banks. You name it, there are people who come, and they want to seek additional government funds.

This select committee, as I envision it—although there will be some people who will ask to have standing to come and make deputations, it would be an opportunity for the select committee to determine who they wanted to hear from, whether we wanted to hear from economists, whether we wanted to hear from people from other jurisdictions or other countries on how they were resolving the issues of banking, how they were resolving the issues of new economies or how they were restructuring in order to make or create jobs in the green economy. It would be an opportunity for all of those people to be brought forward. It would be an opportunity for the committee to travel to locations across the province to see first-hand the downturns in the economy, the devastation that is visited upon the city of Windsor with 17% unemployment, look at what it means to have another shift taken out of the GM plant in Oshawa, at what it's like in Thunder Bay with the unemployment, at what it's like in Atikokan when the forest mill shuts down—at what it's like in Toronto, even, where the number of jobs is declining, house prices are falling and other things. It's an opportunity to look at all of that and much, much more.

I think it's a good idea. I commend the member from Oakville for what he asked today and the way he was able to phrase it in the scant two minutes available to him. I would say what he said to this House in his question: The Liberals should have listened. They certainly listened to his question; the minister answered it. But I don't know whether they're hearing the same thing this afternoon, and I think they should.

For too long governments have hidden from the reality of what is happening worldwide. I know that more than a year ago questions started to be asked in this House about mortgage-backed paper. Questions were asked about the downturn in the United States and the number of people who were walking away from their homes, about the mortgages and the number of homes that were now empty. Questions were asked about Bear Stearns and about Lehman Brothers. Questions were asked about the downgrading of Wall Street stock and the fleeing of capital. Questions were asked about other jurisdictions and other countries with whom we have trade. Questions were asked about the 230,000 jobs that were lost. And throughout all of this, there was a government that looked at the world through rose-coloured glasses.

I don't blame them; it is their job to push Ontario. I stood in this very House and I said that what the Minister of Finance federally had said when he called our Premier the small man of Canada was wrong, and that the Minister of Finance who said, "You shouldn't trade in Ontario" was wrong, because it is up to the government to see things and to put things right and to reassure the public that things are all right.

I understand why the government made those statements, but I don't think the government can say them any longer. The government needs to acknowledge now that we are in a time of financial crisis, and it's not just to "Do as I say" or "Let's just have an economic statement tomorrow and be done with it." It is to try to bring together the best minds and the best ideas from all sides of this House, and indeed from all sides of this province. I think that's what this mechanism can do.

Over the last little while, as I said, the government tried to put on a brave and reassured face. Last December, when delivering his fall economic statement, the finance minister said, "The fundamentals of our economy are vital and strong." This was December 13, 2007, some 10 months ago. He said that then. I don't know whether he firmly believed it, but that's the statement that he made. He went on last spring, when the asset-backed commercial paper mess was beginning to unravel and bank economists were lowering their expectations. The finance minister stated on March 18, 2008, and I quote him again, "The economy is fundamentally strong and resilient...." That was sort of what was being said. I'm not sure that the finance minister is going to rise in his seat and make that kind of statement tomorrow. I don't know how he can and I don't believe he will.

What has happened, quite frankly, in Ontario since those statements were made has been devastating. Just a few of the people and a few of the economies that have suffered: The first one, Sterling Truck in St. Thomas—700 jobs lost. That was on top of the 600 jobs it had lost and announced earlier. DDM Plastics, an auto supplier in Tillsonburg, lost 430 jobs. John Deere of Welland lost 800 jobs. Henniges Automotive, also known as GDX, in Welland, lost 300 jobs. PPG Canada, of Mississauga and Owen Sound, lost 320 jobs. Volvo in Goderich has announced that it's shutting down: a loss of 500 jobs. AbitibiBowater in Thunder Bay had the hours reduced for 150 workers. AbitibiBowater in Thorold closed the plant in November: 480 jobs. Toyota in Woodstock postponed plans for a second shift at the sport utility plant. Progressive Moulded Plastics in the GTA announced a loss of 2,000 jobs. Magna's Formet Industries factory in St. Thomas is closing; that's 400 jobs.

It's not just the job loss, but the statistics coming out of Statistics Canada, the banks and the financial institutions are painting an equally bleak picture. By reading the financial pages of the newspapers and other sources, you can see that manufacturing sales in Ontario decreased 3.1% between July and August. That's a reality of what is happening in our economy: 3.1% between July and August. That is because we are an export nation—

Canada is—and Ontario particularly is an exporting province. Not only do we export to other parts of Canada, but we export around the world, but primarily to our chief trading partner, the United States. Sales and business in the United States are declining at a huge rate.

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I saw an article last week where Mr. Lewenza, the new leader of the Canadian Auto Workers in Canada, talked about the reality of why cars were not being produced. He made some pretty strong economic sense when he said that it's true that in Canada retail sales of automobiles went up 1% that month and that people in Canada were still buying cars and people in Canada were still buying the cars that Canadians make. But the sad reality is that there was an 18% decline in car purchases in the United States. Those cars that are produced jointly in the United States and Canada through the free trade agreement and the former auto pact are not selling there, and so the layoffs are taking place not because Canadians are not buying the Canadian product but because the American economy is in such doldrums.

We also see that primary metal manufacturers experienced a 13.4% drop in the period from July to August, and that, I think, is reflected in that the large construction, automobiles and other things for which primary metal is produced have declined. The transportation equipment industry also reported lower sales in August, as sales decreased 4.2% between July and August. Investment in machinery and equipment declined 1.9% in the last quarter. Investments in new residential structures declined 3% in the last quarter. October 20 Management Issue Survey results of companies across Canada stated that 80% of respondents expressed negative sentiments towards rising costs on transportation and shipping, materials and energy, and 34% of respondents are expecting their sales to decline in 2009, compared with only 17% who believe their top lines will grow next year. The outlook for investment is also negative, with only one third expecting to increase spending on production facilities, in machinery and equipment and in research development in either 2008 or 2009, and at least 14% expect to decrease investment in these areas over the next two years.

We have to do something in this province. We have to do something to change all of that, the perception, the hopes; we have to assuage the fears. We have to do everything that is necessary and possible to keep Ontario as the heartland of industry and commerce in this country. If all that is and if all we can do is to have a committee that is bipartisan to listen to all of the best advice and to advise this government, then we should do it.

Now, I also support this amendment because we, in this party, have brought forward a number of things that we think will help. I don't expect the government to buy into all of them. I certainly am not naive; I have been around here for some seven years, and I have seen many things that I think would aid and assist various bills seem to die when we get to committee. I propose them in good faith, and I think members from all sides of the House

will admit that I do so in the hope not to destroy bills but in fact to make them better, because I honestly believe that we have, and I have, that obligation, sent here by the electors of Beaches–East York, to try to make government work. I know I'm in opposition, and I know my job is to be critical, but my job is also to help. I want to put forward these ideas and I want to have them discussed in the same vein that the Premier said, on numerous occasions over the last couple of weeks, that he wants to hear all good ideas.

The ideas that I put forward on his motion, which is still being debated before this House, were such simple ideas as an industrial hydro rate. I believe that an industrial hydro rate, even in the short term, may be something that we should look at. Certainly countries like Germany have an industrial hydro rate. In many places in Europe they have an industrial hydro rate. The reason that the decline of manufacturing is less severe in both the province of Quebec and in the province of Manitoba than it is in Ontario is because our hydro rate, quite frankly, is higher. We need to look at ways of helping industry to get over this hump, over this bad period, and if one of those is to help by reducing the hydro rate, at least in the short term, then I think we should look at it. They may also have some very long-term strategies which could be examined as well—whether or not, if we are to continue as a manufacturing entity, that hydro rate should be lowered in order to attract and keep manufacturing industries and the jobs that go with them.

We talk here, oftentimes, about a job commissioner. I know that the Minister of Finance has said that he doesn't think that it will work and points to what he considers to be a failure in British Columbia. But I would advise the members opposite that it did work in British Columbia for a long time and was done away with by a new government, and oftentimes new governments have different ideas. During the time that it continued to operate, it operated very well and did save a number of factories from closing and a number of industries from shutting down. I think it's an idea that needs to be explored, whether it can work here or whether it's necessary here in these times of economic turmoil.

We advocate, and I have put forward a motion, in part, for a Buy Ontario policy. I believe with all my heart that we need to buy the goods and services of people locally, that those are the taxpayers who live here, those are the taxpayers to whom we have or should have first allegiance. It's not always the right thing to buy the cheapest product. It is always the right thing to buy locally so that you can secure the jobs and keep the economy prosperous.

I do know that this was the exact policy that we had when I was the mayor of the borough of East York. It was the exact policy that helped during times of economic turmoil while I was mayor. I was mayor from 1993 to the first day of January 1998. It was in that period that we were also in recession, but as a municipality we understood that we had an obligation, when we were buying goods and services, to buy them locally. We

had a policy that we would first buy from any industry that was located in East York and then Toronto and then Ontario and then Canada, and it fanned out, and that we would buy from those groups—local groups, Toronto-based regional groups, provincial groups and national groups—provided that the cost was within 10% of the lowest cost.

So we had a keen eye on a bargain, but we also knew that if we took that bargain, if it came from offshore, if it came from another country or another jurisdiction, it wasn't going to help the people that we represented. I don't remember at all in the five years that I was mayor or in the time preceding that when I was a councillor in the borough of East York that we once awarded any of the awards offshore. I do know, when I went to the city of Toronto following amalgamation, there was a similar policy and that the city of Toronto attempted, wherever possible, to buy locally. When the subway cars were ordered from Thunder Bay, we knew we might be able to get them cheaper from China, we knew that we might be able to get them cheaper from Holland, we knew that they might be able to come from Germany or some other jurisdiction, but we also knew that by buying them locally we were protecting jobs in this province. We are asking that the Ontario government consider doing the same thing.

In our amendment, we are also asking for tougher plant closure legislation that would ensure that everything is done to prevent a profitable plant or mill from closing, and enhanced mandated severance. I do know that in my own history, when I was a young man, much younger than today, I worked at a place called Dunlop's on Queen Street in Toronto. It was a rubber factory. It had been on that same site for probably 60 or 70 years by the time that I worked there. It was a big, smelly place full of danger. There were people who were missing limbs and things from the machinery. But it was a place that provided good and steady employment for those who worked there. I remember the day that they closed. They closed that plant, or announced they were closing it, following a merger between Dunlop and Pirelli of Italy, and so it became Dunlop Pirelli. They closed the plant, not because it didn't make money—because it was still profitable—but because there was more money to be made in the Italian jurisdiction and by bringing in the supplies from Italy.

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I look back on that day with a great deal of sadness because the government of the day allowed that to happen, and workers lost their jobs and we lost a very venerable institution that produced things like conveyor belts and other commodities that were used in industry. Since that time, Canada really has not been able to produce what we need; we buy it offshore.

I look at the expansion of severance—we've talked about eligibility—and increasing advance notice in mass layoff situations. I know that my colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek put forward Bill 6 and fully expected that we would be able to help people with their

pensions and in terms of wage protection, pensions and severance eligibility, only to see that dashed in the committee process, because of course this is a partisan place. Had his bill been sent to an all-party select committee, I am sure that it would have received much wider attention and possibly would have become law by now, because it was a good idea. We are putting forward those same good ideas and would like to have them debated again.

Last but not least, we're talking about a refundable manufacturing and resource investment tax credit that we think will reward companies that choose to stay in Canada, to expand, to keep the jobs and to keep the manufacturing base alive and well here. It is different from what the government does because the government, quite frankly, has chosen simply to reduce corporate taxes. We think it needs to be targeted to the manufacturing sector because that is the sector which is under the greatest stress at this time. If we are going to do it, that is the area where the taxes should be reduced, and they should be reduced in conjunction with job guarantees—something that this government has not done in the past.

In the couple of minutes left, I would say that we also put forward some other ideas relating to stock markets and securities which I think need to be developed and looked upon, if not in this select committee, then at least they need to be heard, because people have invested their life's savings in the stock market—people whom one would not ordinarily think of—through teachers' pension funds and stocks. They need to have those protected.

We need to have some fundamental reforms at the Toronto Stock Exchange as well. The all-party select committee needs to look at such things as creation of a financial product safety commission, just like we have for consumer goods, to make sure that when people invest their money, there is product safety.

We need to ensure that regulators oversee areas of finance that are unregulated. Right now, large pools of capital are not regulated at all. When we studied this in the finance committee a year and a half ago, we discovered that more than one case per day is found where people are making shady deals—I don't know how else to put it—in the stock market and are caught. The Toronto Stock Exchange uncovers at least one a day, and at least one a day is prosecuted in some form.

We need to ensure that when the regulators oversee this, they have more authority. We need to make sure that they have at least the same kind of authority they have in the United States. We need to strengthen the regulation that restricts leverage of all financial companies. We need to deal with conflict of interest, because certainly we don't have any of those regulations. These are just a few of the proposals that I think should go before this committee.

I've spoken now for nearly 40 minutes, and I would like to reiterate one final time that I believe that the proposal put forward by my colleagues from the official opposition is a realistic one. People will look back and say, "Was this Legislature willing to act in our best interests? Were they willing to put down the gloves?

Were they willing to work together in this time of financial crisis, or did they consider this to be just business as usual?"

If the government considers this to be just business as usual, then I guess what is going to happen is, there's going to be the give and take that we have here every day. If they recognize that this is a real crisis that needs to call all people together, then we are here to assist.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: It's my pleasure to join in this discussion today with my colleagues and to discuss the opposition day motion. I wanted to take the motion today piece by piece and explain to Ontarians why this motion is redundant, and I'll give concrete examples to prove it.

The motion states that—and if it's okay with you, I'd like to read it from my notes—the Legislative Assembly—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Will the member please take her seat? I'd ask the member for Durham to come to order and allow the member from Kitchener-Conestoga to make her comments.

Member for Kitchener-Conestoga.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The motion states, "That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario calls upon the Ontario government to establish a select committee ... to address the challenges faced by Ontario families and businesses in the province's current weakened economy."

I've had the privilege to travel this great province and to hear from the people of Ontario, to hear their opinions, their concerns and their recommendations around finance and the economy. I'm proud to have travelled as a member of the government's Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

This government is ahead of the opposition and the recommendation for a select committee, as we have already been travelling throughout the province. The committee that the opposition proposes already exists. The people of Ontario have responded and thanked us, and I just wanted to take a moment to acknowledge some of the people who we met in our travels across the province who support all of the hard work of this committee.

Chief Dean Sayers says, "My name is Chief Dean Sayers. I am the chief of the Batchewana First Nation here in the local area. I want to first of all thank all of those individuals who made their way here. I'm sure there are more than just members of the provincial Parliament, but I thank you guys for coming up and giving us an opportunity to have some input...."

Chief Isadore Day from Serpent River First Nation says, "Good morning, ladies and gentlemen of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. On behalf of Serpent River First Nation members, staff and leadership, I want to thank you for your time here today."

Mr. Brian Brown, president of the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations, said, "I'd like

to begin by thanking the committee members for their hard work and for having us here today. We very much appreciate the opportunity to share our research on post-secondary education.”

Mr. Sid Ryan, president of CUPE Ontario, said, “Thank you for the opportunity to make a presentation here today.”

Mr. Peter Woolford, vice-president of policy development and research for the Retail Council of Canada, said, “Mr. Chairman, thank you for inviting us here this morning. It’s a pleasure to be back in front of the committee. It’s been a couple of years since I’ve been here, and on behalf of Retail Council of Canada, we’re very grateful for the opportunity to provide the thoughts and concerns of our members to the legislators today....”

This one I’ll save because it’s from my riding of Kitchener–Conestoga, so I’ll come back to it.

I’ll just end at this point with Ms. Lynn Peterson, the mayor of the city of Thunder Bay, who said, “I would like to first take the opportunity to thank you for being in the city of Thunder Bay. The weather’s not always this cold; I’ll let you know that.” It was a pleasure to meet her that day.

The motion also states, “The committee shall be empowered to invite witnesses to appear before it as it deems necessary,” and we just heard commentaries and quotes from witnesses who appeared before the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs. We had the opportunity to listen to a plethora of stakeholders, a true representation of all Ontarians, and to hear their input, suggestions and recommendations. We had the opportunity to hear about their lives, their businesses, their communities, their groups and organizations.

I thought I would just share one of those stakeholders and his comments. Mr. Art Sinclair is the director of economic development with the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce. He said, “I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to appear this afternoon on this fine southern Ontario day in January.” Mr. Sinclair goes on to say, “We proposed a series of recommendations related to infrastructure development and tax cuts which we considered as priorities for both our region and businesses across Ontario. We would like to commend the provincial government for delivering on these proposals, which provide fiscal relief to our members and initiate some critical infrastructure projects that are central to our local capacity and ability to manage growth in Waterloo region.”

The next piece in the motion states, “It shall make recommendations on specific measures to be undertaken by the government in the short term to address Ontario’s ... pressing challenges.” Again, the McGuinty government is way ahead in that this committee not only already exists, but its mandate is to report to the House its observations, opinions and recommendations on the fiscal and economic policies of the province of Ontario.

The motion also states that the committee shall be composed of government members and members of the official opposition and third party. Again, this already

exists. I sit on this committee with members of the official opposition and members of the third party. It already has all-party representation. Every budget bill goes to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs; other finance-related bills go there.

The committee will report to the House: The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs has travelled the province extensively, and we will continue to do so.

The fundamental responsibility of this committee is to seek out new ideas and to consult Ontarians: I tell you—no, I reassure you first-hand, as a member of the finance committee—that this is exactly what we are already doing. It’s clearly working, as we see the opposition motion today is calling on this to happen. In effect, then, they are supporting this committee and the work that we do and our mandate, however peculiar it is that some of their members participate on the committee, and today’s motion would indicate that they are unaware of all of the great work that this committee does.

Perhaps yet another endorsement: In my community of Kitchener–Conestoga and Waterloo region, school boards and health care providers gave personal thanks—they sent them to the Office of the Premier; they sent them to my office—for taking the time to come out and to listen to them and to hear what they had to say. Mr. Wayne Buchholtz said as he appeared before the committee, “Thank you very much, first of all, for the opportunity to meet with you again this year. My name is Wayne Buchholtz. I’m the chair of the Waterloo Catholic District School Board.”

So I have lots and lots more quotes, more support, more commentary. At this point, I will wrap up my comments to give my colleagues some time to speak as well, but I did want to end with Mr. David Musy, who appeared before us as well. He’s president and CEO of the Windsor Regional Hospital, and he says, “Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today regarding the Ontario health premium. In my opinion, up to this point we have made substantial progress as a health care system, along with the ministry, in achieving each and every one of these items.”

So it has been my pleasure since being elected to serve on the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, and I look forward to continuing to do so on behalf of the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett: You know, as this debate goes to and fro on the need for a select committee on the economy, we do recognize the damage that has been done. Five years of overspending and five years of overtaking and year-end spending sprees have left us weakened and vulnerable. The money has been spent. The recipients will not be returning any of it. The votes have been bought and we’re really in one heck of a jam right now, as banks tell us we’re going into a recession.

Even though we had five relatively good years, nothing was salted away for the rainy days that are now

upon us. It's sad, really, but, as they say, the toothpaste is out of the tube. This government needs help. This government needs advice. It needs direction, the kind of advice you could get from the establishment of a select committee.

We could debate economic theory in this House until the cows come home, but to what purpose? We need expert advice, again, through the kind of committee that we are proposing. We need the advice of the ordinary man, the ordinary woman who would come forward during hearings. After all, their neck is on the line. It's their house, it's their pension, their farm, their business, their source of income. Many of these people didn't really reap the benefits, the largesse, if you will, of the past five years; others did.

There are more reasons for Ontario to have a select committee on the economy, not just finance committee hearings like the ones coming up this Friday. In fact, this Friday there is only one witness coming forward. The rest of the day is cancelled. I sit on finance. It's not really the mechanism to deal with the magnitude of the kinds of problems that we're looking at now in the province of Ontario.

Thousands and thousands of families are leaving because they don't see opportunity here; they don't see a future here. Young people don't see a future here. This is what happens when you get the fundamentals wrong. You start to slide. Soon the decline picks up speed and, before you know it, we have a situation, as we have now, where Ontario is dead last in Canada as far as economic growth.

We need a structure. We propose a select committee. Bring in business, bring in unions to testify. I think of the example of a small businessman who wishes to hire an apprentice. Under McGuinty government rules, if he's in the electrical business, for example, he's forced to hire three unionized electricians for every one apprentice. Now we know why that particular business is not growing. Now we know why young people would move to the province of Alberta, for example.

When the Ministry of Labour conducts something called an ergonomic audit on a small business and orders them to spend tens of thousands of dollars on new chairs, again, we understand why they aren't able to invest in new equipment to offset the dollar. We need a business like that to come forward before a select committee and to explain basically why we've gotten into the pickle we're in now.

We know that Ontario has the highest taxes on new business investment in all of Canada. We also know why risk-takers and entrepreneurs are taking those investments and the dreams and the jobs that go with them somewhere else, and they are taking thousands of our brightest and youngest with them. That is why young people are leaving Ontario. When our young people take leave—when they take our future with them, it will not come back. Hence, we need a select committee on Ontario's economy, we need an awful lot more deliberation, and we do have to hear from the experts.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. David Oraziatti: I have the opportunity today to speak to the opposition day motion, and I'm certainly pleased to do so.

I think the point has been made quite clearly by members on this side of the House that the committee that is being proposed already exists for all intents and purposes, and it's called the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, for those people who may be out there watching. The committee's mandate is to "report to the House its observations, opinions and recommendations on the fiscal and economic policies of the province" of Ontario. We all know the importance of this committee, and I think most members in this House have participated in one way or another on that committee and have travelled the province and have participated in the prebudget consultations to gather the very important information that we have the opportunity to hear that comes from individuals from many walks of life in the province of Ontario. We certainly think that's a very important committee.

Every budget goes to the standing committee. Other finance bills related to the business of the province go before this committee. We present our budgets in the Ontario Legislature. Unlike the opposition, we don't hold them at auto parts plants. That committee has all-party representation, that committee will report to this House, and the fundamental responsibility of that committee is to seek out new ideas and consult Ontarians.

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We take advantage of all the ideas that are put forward by everyone who comes with a good idea. I was certainly a member of this committee, and I had the opportunity to serve with members in the opposition party, some of whom I see here today in the Legislature. They know very well that we've travelled to many different communities, like London, Windsor, Timmins, Sudbury, Thunder Bay and St. Catharines, to get advice and input from leaders from all sectors of Ontario, including finance and manufacturing, the natural resource sector, education and, of course, health care. The information that comes forward through that committee is incredibly important.

The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs is just one of the ways our government consults with Ontarians on economic issues. In fact, very shortly, in the next few weeks, I'll be welcoming the Minister of Finance to our riding of Sault Ste. Marie for one of his scheduled prebudget consultations. I think that's another example of the important work that we do to gather an effective strategy for our budget process.

In my community, we're going to be inviting a wide array of leaders, including representatives from the school boards—the Algoma District School Board, the Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board—Essar Algoma Steel, the Algoma public health unit, the Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce, the children's aid society, Sault College, the Sault Area Hospital and the

city of Sault Ste. Marie. The list is very lengthy, and we're very appreciative of all the input we get at the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

The counsel that we receive from these Ontarians and from members on all sides of the House helps to shape our economic policy. We know that today in the province of Ontario, there are over 449,000 net new jobs more than there were in 2003, and more than 72% of those are good-paying, full-time jobs. From January to August this year, Ontario in fact created 60% of all the net new jobs in our country. However, as we all know, the recent financial struggles that many countries are facing have affected our manufacturing sector, and it continues to struggle, as does the manufacturing sector in many parts of the world. But I would rather be in this jurisdiction than many others, because we have a plan in Ontario, and it's working well.

We've made strategic investments in the auto sector and we've secured \$7.5 billion in new investments, like the new Toyota plant that's being built in Woodstock. We've created a Next Generation of Jobs Fund for job creation, a \$1.5-billion strategy to help new companies grow. While the whole world is looking for new green technologies, we're going to be working with our innovative industrial manufacturers to ensure that we can design them here in Ontario and we can sell them to other countries.

Our government has a five-point plan to support economic development in these challenging times that all countries are facing and all jurisdictions are facing, and I want to talk a little bit about that. First of all, we're talking about cutting business taxes. We've enacted \$3 billion in cuts and rebates. We've eliminated the capital tax for manufacturers in the resource sector, which was retroactive to January 2007, and it has amounted to \$190 million in rebates. We've also cut the capital tax for other businesses by 21%. We're cutting the business education tax and are accelerating that cut for northern Ontario businesses. In my community of Sault Ste. Marie, what it has meant is \$6.5 million less in business education taxes paid over three years. I'm not sure why the Conservatives didn't support that or why, frankly, they didn't do that while they were in government for eight years, but that didn't happen.

We're also investing in infrastructure. We committed \$60 billion over 10 years to build hospitals, schools, courthouses, public transit projects, roads and bridges, which is creating hundreds of thousands of jobs in the province of Ontario. We've created an Investing in Ontario Act for municipalities. It's \$1.1 billion, and it has created 11,000 jobs.

In addition to that, we have our \$6.2-billion Building Canada fund, which is an agreement with the federal government. Our \$1 billion to municipalities this year for transit, roads and bridges and affordable housing has really helped to alleviate some of the pressure that our municipalities are under. In addition to that, we've provided \$450 million for a municipal infrastructure program and over \$700 million for college and university construction projects.

In my community, it's meant great news for people in Sault Ste. Marie. We have our \$408-million hospital under construction in our city. I'm not sure why the Conservatives didn't move on that when they had the opportunity, but it was sorely needed. It's a community project that is very welcome.

Over \$46 million has been allocated to build new schools in Sault Ste. Marie. For the first time in 35 years, our community will be seeing new schools built. We've provided \$17 million for road upgrades and improvements, and we've built a new youth centre, at the cost of about \$8 million. This was great news to our community, since the Conservatives closed the last youth centre that we had, sending the 30 jobs out of our community. In addition to that, as far as infrastructure goes, we also built an additional OPP forensic lab, at a cost of about \$5.6 million, something that was sorely lacking.

As part of our five-point plan, we're also investing in innovation. As you know, we created a new Ministry of Research and Innovation. We've introduced a \$165-million venture capital fund that is helping to create new, high-paying jobs. We've added \$250 million to laboratories for equipment and to enhance our research capacity in the province of Ontario. In addition to that, \$150 million has been allocated for biopharmacy investment in Ontario to attract new pharmaceutical projects and initiatives to this province.

Our standard offer program, I think, is very unique, certainly unique in this country. It has helped to encourage investment in green technology. In my community it has meant the largest wind farm in the country, a \$400-million investment, creating additional jobs and clean, green, renewable power. I'm not sure why the opposition didn't lead with some of these initiatives when they had the opportunity, but they didn't do that, for whatever reason.

In addition to that, a \$360-million investment for our solar project and a \$135-million capital project at Algoma Steel for our cogeneration project has been great news in our community.

We've been partnering with business in things like our auto investment strategy, and our Next Generation of Jobs Fund has been certainly bearing results. We're investing in the skills of our people. We have 100,000 more college and university spaces today, are graduating 10,000 more students from high school, increasing our apprenticeship spaces by 50,000, and we're on track to increase that a further 25%.

I could go on and on about the initiatives that have been positive in our community. I know our investments and our plan are working. So when I hear the comments from the opposition around this motion and this committee, frankly, it's smoke and mirrors. We have a committee. We're on track with the investments. We're on track with a plan. They've had three plans in the last four to five years, and I'm not sure which plan it is this week, but we have a plan that we're going to be sticking to and continuing to invest in the strength of our people.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm pleased to recognize the member for Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: It's always a pleasure to respond on our opposition day motion. I think it's important for the viewers today and those present to reflect for a moment on the civility and tone of the resolution itself. It is very conciliatory to the government in the idea of establishing, in fairness, a select committee, the structure and the chairing of which would be completely in the government's favour. As well, from the experience of select committees that I've been part of in the past, it is certainly the right thing to do.

I think a good example of this would be—two things, really. Just recently, last night, in fact, on TVOntario—Steve Paikin has a very interesting show, *The Agenda*, and is really, I believe, taking the initiative himself. I congratulate Steve Paikin for that, for the people of Ontario watching that non-partisan show. He had all of the stakeholders on. He had Wayne Samuelson from the Ontario Federation of Labour. Joe Cordiano, the former minister, was on there, and people of all political perspectives—Catherine Swift from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and I would say that the competition people were there as well.

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But the point is this: The dialogue, and the genuineness of the dialogue, was instructive to the people of Ontario. Ontario is in an economic challenge—you could say it even more dramatically, I suppose: a slump. It's not all Dalton's fault, I understand that, but it's what he hasn't done. It's a lack of steadiness on the expenditure side of the budget. If you listen to the people there, the competitiveness academics, who speak to that issue—Roger Martin and others, and Jack Mintz—they're saying that we're the least competitive jurisdiction in the world. This is not John Tory or Bob Runciman saying it. It's academics who are saying that Ontario needs to be competitive in this global context of a recession, and our dependence on manufacturing must be more innovative. When you look at the bill that's before the Legislature—it's before committee now; Mr. Barrett was talking about it—there's nobody appearing before the committee. In fact, the general public are convinced that no one will benefit from Bill 100. It's what they're not doing that causes me problems.

I had the privilege of being on a select committee when we were government. On that committee—it was chaired by Doug Galt. I'm just going to go through some of the members. It was a very distinguished committee—most of the people, anyway: Sean Conway, who was well respected on the energy file—it was a select committee on alternative energies—and who was very eminently respected and highly regarded. The Vice-Chair was Dr. Marie Bountrogianni from the Liberal party. She's since resigned—or didn't run again; I don't know why. There was also Marilyn Churley from the NDP. Marilyn Churley is a strong advocate for the environment, and indeed on the energy file, and she was very well informed.

On our part, our side, was Steve Gilchrist. We called the final report the Gilchrist report. That always made

Steve feel good. Jerry Ouellette, who is from the Durham region, was on that committee—Oshawa is his riding; he's still here—John Hastings was on the committee, and I was on the committee. In my riding, of course—all of us have an interest, but I have a nuclear plant in my riding.

I should tell the members here today that that select committee, structured as it was, came up with a unanimous report dealing with things like the supply mix, which included the debate on nuclear. It talked about incineration; it talked about all the innovation that you can think of on the energy file. That unanimous report served as the basis for the Ontario Power Authority and their supply mix report. So it can work, it should work, and the time is now for the government at least to have the courage to implement this committee.

It's such a contradiction when you think of the politics of this and the opportunities. Last week, when we had the Premier make the statement on economics, which we were debating earlier today, he was saying that it's basically someone else's fault for all of this stuff. I expect that tomorrow when we have the economic update, we're going to hear the same thing: It's somebody else's fault. Well, if none of it is his fault, he can't be taking credit for any of the successes. Do you understand? What goes around in this debate has to be accountable.

I would say to you that if you look at, most recently, the evidence, the truth is, the future predictor is current behaviour—or, past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour. Just last week we had a couple of signs. We had the Ontario Energy Board introduce higher rates, up to a 12% increase in the electricity rates. We also had the transportation charge, up 8% in some jurisdictions of Ontario. Those are tax increases.

Just this morning, we had Mr. Gerretsen, the Minister of the Environment, talk about shifting the load and who's going to pay for Waste Diversion Ontario. He's going to load it onto business.

Interjection: Another Green Shift plan.

Mr. John O'Toole: Another Green Shift plan by Mr. Gerretsen. You can see that their plan is—clearly, they don't know how to control spending. It's up some 40%. You have to ask yourself, is it any better?

I've made my case: Have a select committee and let's get talking to and listening to the experts of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Hon. Jim Watson: I'm very pleased to participate in this debate. As a number of my colleagues have indicated, we won't be supporting this particular motion.

This is very much inside baseball. People, if they are watching this, are wondering, what is the difference between a select committee, which the opposition is proposing, and a standing committee? Let me read you what it says about the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs on page 53 of the standing orders:

“Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, which is empowered to consider and report to the

House its observations, opinions and recommendations on the fiscal and economic policies of the province and to which all related documents shall be deemed to have been referred immediately when the said documents are tabled."

Now, that's inside baseball, but what it says in a nutshell is that it allows our Legislative Assembly to refer matters of an economic and financial nature to a standing committee that is already in existence. It's rather underwhelming that the entire Conservative Party response to the economic crisis is to have a new committee go and travel the province and ask questions about what's wrong with the economy when in fact we already have a mechanism in place that's funded by the taxpayers, and quite frankly, it's worked very well.

Let me just give you three examples of three individuals who appeared before the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. John Cartwright, president of the Toronto and York Region Labour Council, said, "Clearly, your committee understands the context of the budget preparations in the same way we do, that the drastic loss of manufacturing jobs is a crisis for the people of Ontario; that growing poverty and disparities in our society is a crucial issue which the government has pledged to start addressing."

Hugh Lawson, whom I had the pleasure of spending some time with on Friday, who is president of the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association—they met in Ottawa just last week—appeared before the committee and said, "At the outset, let me say how pleased we are to see issues related to affordable housing and a commitment to poverty reduction finally taking a priority on the government's agenda."

Doug Reyecraft, who is the outgoing president of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and also the mayor of Southwest Middlesex, said, "Municipalities are pleased with the progress that is now being made. A key milestone was reached last August when Premier McGuinty announced a timed, full upload of two entire, key social programs: the Ontario disability support program and the Ontario drug benefit program. As a result of that announcement, by 2011, the province will have reduced its reliance on municipal property taxes by \$935 million a year."

We in fact do have a plan. It's a plan that's often been talked about and we're proud of—the Premier's five-point plan—that is well beyond the simplistic solution of setting up a select committee. The plan deals with investing in skills and knowledge. I'm proud of the fact that our Premier was in my riding of Ottawa West—Nepean several months ago and announced a \$35-million investment in the Algonquin College skilled trades building, and that my colleague Phil McNeely made an announcement that several million dollars was going to go into la Cité for their skilled trades building. Now, we are still waiting for the federal government to come to the table. They had made a grand commitment to support the Algonquin project and la Cité, but regrettably, we have not seen them come to the table with anything but a press

release. Regrettably, you can't endorse the back of a press release and get money from it.

Let me also tell you also about some of the other investments that have been made in eastern Ontario that I'm particularly proud of, investments that are helping to spur the economy. There's no question that there's an economic challenge facing us, and while I appreciate the opposition coming forward with their new one-point plan, which is to strike a committee to travel the province, our plan is working because, as the Premier said today, we actually repaired the roof before it started to rain. We built the foundation of the house of Ontario.

We're investing in health care. The cancer centre at the Queensway Carleton Hospital is a good example.

Interjections.

Hon. Jim Watson: Mr. Speaker, the honourable member from Lanark is not in his chair and I'd ask that he come to order, please.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It's not your role to ask members to come to order, but I appreciate your intervention and assistance. I would ask all members of the House, on all sides of the House, to refrain from heckling so that I can hear the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm the member from Carleton—Mississippi Mills, not Lanark. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you for that clarification as well.

I'll return to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

1740

Hon. Jim Watson: I'd ask for an additional 15 or 20 seconds because of the time that was taken.

I know the honourable member from eastern Ontario was particularly embarrassed by his time in office because, in health care, they tried to close the Montfort Hospital; they tried to close the CHEO cardiac unit; they did close the Grace hospital; they did close the Riverside Hospital. I am very proud that our members from eastern Ontario have stood up. We're doubling the size of the Montfort Hospital, we're building a new cancer centre at the Queensway Carleton Hospital, we're expanding the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, and, in the process, we're creating thousands of jobs in construction and in health sciences.

In addition, the work that we have done with the municipal sector, I'm particularly proud of.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would ask the House to come to order so as to allow the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to make his presentation.

I recognize the minister once again.

Hon. Jim Watson: I know that some members here have dreams of joining the Senate, where they can act like this, but in this Legislature we expect a little more decorum because we're proud of the fact that this government is finally standing up for eastern Ontario and the municipalities of eastern Ontario.

Let me talk about Smiths Falls for a moment: \$6.2 million on our MIII infrastructure program; Brockville, \$800,000 for their arts centre; \$20 million for the city of Ottawa for their archives building, located at CentrepoinTE. These are real investments, not a paper exercise of establishing some committee that is going to go around the province and listen to people whom we've already listened to.

We have a plan. It's working. We need the support of the federal government to ensure an element of fairness in the plan. We're proud of the work that we're doing for the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? I'm pleased to recognize the member for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to rise in the Legislature today to speak in favour of our opposition day motion to create a select committee on the Ontario economy, a non-partisan committee to hear what Ontarians have to say, not the committee that the Liberals suggest is doing the job, because they aren't doing the job or we'd be seeing more action out of the present McGuinty government. They try to slip something through at the last minute, debating an economic motion here: no discussion with the opposition leaders; just kind of slip that in to cover themselves off, to pretend to say that they're listening.

Let's hear what's happening out there in Ontario. Let me see. We've got a struggling economy, with over 200,000 lost manufacturing jobs. What's wrong with a meaningful debate about what would be in the best interests of Ontarians, and to support this non-partisan committee that we have suggested? We in the PC Party in opposition have been trying to assist the government with ideas for Ontario's struggling economy. This committee would be more accountable. There would be a proper, thorough process in order to make the most out of the thoughts and ideas that come forward, not the partisan committee that they think is working, the finance committee. It's all lopsided and it's not working. It's time to move forward in the proper way, to chart a new course for Ontario's struggling economy and all the hard-working families.

It seems that every day we're hearing about more and more job losses. I think they've turned the earmuffs on over there. But the fact is, the Liberal government imposes the highest marginal tax rate on business investment in the world. If it were in Canada, that would be bad enough, but it's the highest marginal tax rate on business investment in the world. You should be embarrassed over there.

Instead of doing things to increase the interest in investment, Dalton McGuinty is doing when he likes to do: He's licking his tax-loving chops and telling people, "Hey, come on over here because we're a lovable government. We want your tax dollars. As a matter of fact, we want them so bad that we've got the highest marginal effective tax rate on business investment that you'll ever find."

In Canada, we actually have an NDP government in Manitoba, a Conservative government in Alberta and a Liberal government in British Columbia that all have lower effective tax rates on investment. This isn't right for this province, but hey, it's tax money, and Dalton McGuinty is so famous for "I need your money." Let's not forget: This is a Liberal government that is so weighed down with ideology and saying, "We know what's right. Just trust us."

Hon. Jim Watson: Laurie, it's supposed to be non-partisan.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I know the Minister of Municipal Affairs, who is never partisan—I never hear anything partisan from you at all. You're famous for being non-partisan, I say.

Hon. Jim Watson: Listen to your leader, Mad Dog.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I am, and I say, you should support this opposition day motion—a non-partisan committee. It's a fair and reasonable thing to do, to have a select committee that isn't so biased, like your present Liberal finance committee. But—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would ask the House to come to order so that I can hear the member make her presentation.

I'll return to the member for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for telling them on the opposite side of the House to just tone down and maybe listen a little bit.

So this select committee is not a partisan political gesture. It's fair; it's a reasonable thing to do. It's designed to help real Ontarians in order to simply make ends meet. They have every right to be concerned about their jobs. It's a direct attempt to strengthen the economic debate and give the accountability that it should have. So frankly, if the Premier and his finance minister feel so strongly about your so-called economic debate motion, then be accountable; put it to the test. If the Minister of Finance feels so strongly about his so-called five-point plan, put it to the test and be accountable to the people of this province. If you feel strongly about your economic update tomorrow, then stand behind it and provide a real accounting of complete government finances. My guess is, the minister won't do it, but if he feels strongly about his measures to address Ontario's economic challenge, just put it to the test and be accountable by not blocking the proposed select committee from presenting a report and measures to be undertaken, and give it the proper weight it deserves.

Premier McGuinty opened the economic debate by saying that he's doing this in order to hear and listen. Then, Premier, why don't you hold yourself to that commitment? We're talking about families here. We're talking about the future of Ontario. Anything less is simply window dressing. God forbid that accountability and results be part and parcel with a Liberal policy, but it's pretty clear that Liberal policies are about headlines and photo ops. Results don't seem to be an important

measure of success as much as the amount of ink being covered in the papers and websites. Frankly, if you take away the sense of entitlement that Liberals attach to their policies, all you're left with is David Dingwall's skeleton. I know that Halloween is just a few days away, but that's just too scary.

Broken promises and empty partisan gestures that take tons of taxpayers' time and money are the Liberals' order of the day. We're asking for a non-partisan select committee to really hear what the people of Ontario are saying. I encourage the government to support this motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? I recognize the member for Carleton-Mississippi Mills.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I'd just like to talk a little bit about the composition of this committee and compare it to some degree to the public accounts committee, which operates in a non-partisan way. In fact, over the last five years on the public accounts committee, I think we have had one vote on which there was a division between the opposition and the government side.

The difference between this select committee and the sitting economic committee is the balance between the government members and the opposition members. Under the economic committee, which is now sitting in the Legislature—the standing committee—there are five Liberal members and three opposition members. This motion puts forward a committee which balances that between the opposition and the governing party.

I can understand some reluctance on the part of the government to give that kind of power to the opposition parties. However, I would remind them that we are going into a very difficult period of time when all members of this Legislature are going to have to act in a responsible manner. I can't understand why the government would not want to share the responsibility with the opposition to come up with solutions to our present economic crisis that we now face.

The power of this committee is only to make recommendations to the government and to comment on the plan put forward by the government. If the opposition came back with silly recommendations or a silly response, we would be hurting our credibility as much as the government would be. Quite frankly, I cannot understand why the government does not want to share that responsibility with all members of this Legislature, and I urge them to support this resolution in that light.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Mr. Runciman has moved "that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario calls upon the Ontario government to establish a select committee on the Ontario economy to consider and report on options to address the challenges faced by Ontario families and businesses in the province's current weakened economy.

"The terms of reference for this select committee shall be as follows:

"The committee shall, among other matters, review the government's current five-point economic plan and

the proposals raised by members of this House during debate on the government motion on the economy tabled October 7, 2008. It shall make recommendations on specific measures to be undertaken by the government in the short term to address Ontario's most immediate and pressing challenges, as well as recommendations for a long-range, multi-year economic recovery plan.

"The committee shall be empowered to invite witnesses to appear before it as it deems necessary.

"The committee shall be non-partisan in makeup, being composed of five government members, three members of the official opposition and two members of the third party. It shall be chaired by a government member, and a member of the official opposition shall serve as Vice-Chair. The membership of the committee, including the identification of the Chair and Vice-Chair, shall be filed with the Clerk of the Assembly by the whips of the recognized parties no later than October 31, 2008.

"The committee shall have the authority to meet concurrently with the House and during any adjournment of the House, notwithstanding prorogation.

"The committee shall have the authority to commission reports relevant to the terms of reference and to travel within Ontario if the committee deems travel to be necessary.

"The committee shall present an interim report with recommendations on immediate measures to be undertaken by the government no later than December 11, 2008, and the committee shall present its final report to the Legislative Assembly no later than March 15, 2009. If the House is not sitting, the committee has the authority to release any report by depositing a copy of it with the Clerk of the Assembly, and, upon resumption of the sittings of the House, the Chair of the committee shall present such report to the House in accordance with the standing orders."

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members.

The division bells rang from 1752 to 1802.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Mr. Runciman has moved opposition day motion number 2. All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time.

Ayes

Bailey, Robert
Barrett, Toby
Dunlop, Garfield
Elliott, Christine
Gélinas, France
Hardeman, Ernie

Klees, Frank
MacLeod, Lisa
Miller, Norm
O'Toole, John
Prue, Michael
Runciman, Robert W.

Scott, Laurie
Sterling, Norman W.
Wilson, Jim
Witmer, Elizabeth

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): All those opposed to the motion will please rise one at a time.

Nays

Arthurs, Wayne	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Oraziotti, David
Balkissoon, Bas	Fonseca, Peter	Pendergast, Leeanna
Bartolucci, Rick	Gravelle, Michael	Pupatello, Sandra
Best, Margaret	Hoy, Pat	Qaadri, Shafiq
Brown, Michael A.	Jaczek, Helena	Ramsay, David
Brownell, Jim	Kwinter, Monte	Rinaldi, Lou
Cansfield, Donna H.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ruprecht, Tony
Chan, Michael	Mangat, Amrit	Smitherman, George
Colle, Mike	Matthews, Deborah	Sorbara, Greg
Craitor, Kim	Mauro, Bill	Takhar, Harinder S.
Crozier, Bruce	McMeekin, Ted	Van Bommel, Maria
Dickson, Joe	McNeely, Phil	Watson, Jim
Dombrowsky, Leona	Meilleur, Madeleine	Zimmer, David
Duguid, Brad	Mitchell, Carol	
Duncan, Dwight	Naqvi, Yasir	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):

The ayes are 16; the nays are 43.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

TOBACCO CONTROL

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question last Thursday given by the Minister of Health Promotion concerning tobacco investment. The member has up to five minutes to debate this matter, and the minister or parliamentary assistant has up to two minutes to reply.

I recognize the member for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock.

Ms. Laurie Scott: My reason for this request, pursuant to standing order 37(a), is that I'm unsatisfied with the complete non-answer from the Minister of Health Promotion and her avoidance in addressing the question I posed last Thursday, October 16. The question that I asked was a pointed and direct question pertaining to investments made by government-paid—therefore taxpayer-paid—money that is being invested into tobacco stocks in the USA. This avoidance of answering questions has become nothing short of a routine by the Minister of Health Promotion. Let me quote from the Toronto Sun not so long ago:

"Best's response to an earlier question from Norm Miller so baffled the veteran Tory MPP that he raised a point of order.

"Doesn't the answer have to relate to the question?" Miller asked Speaker Steve Peters.

"Well, yes it does. And if you keep up this kind of patronizing gobbledygook, you will reduce question period ... to a complete farce."

This is an opportunity for the minister to respond with something more than gobbledygook.

As a matter of fact, the response the minister gave last Thursday was the very reason for asking her the question:

that tobacco and smoking cost this province too many lives and too many health care costs. That's clear, but it doesn't answer the question I posed.

The OP Trust, the OPSEU pension plan fund, has \$21 million invested into Philip Morris companies, the largest tobacco company in the USA. The Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan has nearly \$80 million invested into Altria Group, Inc., the parent company of Philip Morris—let me repeat: the largest company in the USA. On September 4, nearly seven weeks ago at estimates, I asked the Minister of Research and Innovation if the Ontario venture capital fund, which he oversees, invests in tobacco-related stocks. Despite the minister promising to table that information on a simple question, I have yet to receive any information—a little bit of a pattern forming here.

I don't know if it would be the Minister of Health Promotion who will be responding to the statement and questions today or if it's the parliamentary assistant, but I would say to the parliamentary assistant to the minister, the member from Oak Ridges, who is also a former health professional and former medical officer of health: Does she agree with this type of investment? That's the question that I hope will be addressed here after my few minutes.

The member from Oak Ridges has spoken many times about the challenges she faced trying to get her patients to quit smoking. Does investing millions of dollars of taxpayers' money into the USA's largest tobacco company help or not help people quit smoking? That was the question I asked, which the Minister of Health Promotion did not answer. I hope to get an answer to that question today.

This is a question about protecting young people. Teachers have a profound influence on the youth of Ontario. So the question is, do you agree with the teachers' union of Ontario and their investment of \$79.9 million in the USA's largest tobacco company? There's your so-called three-step approach to battle smoking; it does include public education. I would suggest that teachers are considered very important in the role of public education. Their millions of dollars of investment into Philip Morris, the leading tobacco company in the USA, appears to fly in the face of everything that the Minister of Health Promotion is pretending to fool Ontarians into thinking. Tobacco farmers in Ontario are being treated like second-class citizens by the Liberal government, yet Minister Best and Dalton McGuinty feel it's perfectly fine to invest in tobacco outside of Ontario.

The member from Oak Ridges-Markham was in fact quoted right here in this chamber when referring to reducing tobacco use: "Consistency is a major issue." She also stated, "The US Environmental Protection Agency has officially labelled second-hand smoke as a class A cancer-causing substance." So it's okay to quote the US Environmental Protection Agency, but apparently she also feels it's perfectly okay for both the OP Trust and the teachers' federation to invest millions of taxpayer-paid money in the largest tobacco producer in the very same USA.

Consistency is a major issue; I agree. So I challenge those on the Liberal benches to be consistent, and not just talk about it. Lack of consistency certainly lies completely with the Liberals, the Minister of Health Promotion and the member from Oak Ridges–Markham.

Let me quote a line from the Minister of Health Promotion's standard go-to sheet. She said in April, "Selling cigarettes when you buy candy and milk only makes cigarettes seem normal to young people, and that is just plain wrong." So I say to the minister that spending \$56 million per year on getting Ontarians to reduce tobacco use and then allowing taxpayers' money to be invested into over \$100 million of tobacco stocks in the USA—I wonder if she doesn't think that's just plain wrong.

I don't have much time left. I just hope that I get some answers to this question that I have today.

1810

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Health Promotion has five minutes to reply.

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I certainly appreciate the opportunity to be here today to respond to the question from the member opposite.

As I had responded before, the McGuinty government is committed to the health of Ontarians, and the mandate of the Ministry of Health Promotion is investing in programs to benefit the health of Ontarians. The programs are to prevent chronic diseases, among other preventative initiatives. That is what we in the Ministry of Health Promotion are mandated to do, and that is what is within the purview of this ministry.

We are reaching out to Ontarians to lead healthy, active lives. This government is not waiting for Ontarians to get sick; we are taking measures to prevent them from getting sick in the first place.

On one end, we are investing in chronic disease prevention and diabetes prevention. On the other end, we are investing in sport infrastructure so that Ontarians have access to the amenities they need to lead active, healthy lives. This is within the purview, again, of the Ministry of Health Promotion.

In this regard, I would like to speak to the McGuinty government's leadership in making Ontario smoke-free.

Smoking is the number one preventable cause of death in Ontario, and we are well aware of that. That is why we have many different programs that we have started in this ministry to address that issue. That is why our government has brought in the toughest smoke-free legislation in North America, the Smoke-Free Ontario Act.

The McGuinty government is committed to a multi-faceted approach. We are helping Ontarians to quit

smoking. We are preventing young people from starting to smoke. We prohibited the sale of tobacco to any person under the age of 19. We have made it mandatory for anyone who appears to be under the age of 25 years to present an ID before purchasing tobacco.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's hypocrisy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I have to ask the member for Nepean–Carleton to withdraw that unparliamentary remark.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Withdrawn, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I return to the Minister of Health Promotion.

Hon. Margaret R. Best: We have brought in the tobacco display ban. We have banned smoking in cars with young children. We are indeed protecting Ontarians from second-hand smoke.

Ontario's youth are Ontario's future. Studies indicate that if a person does not start smoking before the age of 19, it increases the chances that this individual will never smoke. That is why the McGuinty government has taken decisive actions to protect young Ontarians from the harmful effects of tobacco products.

Since 2005, we have invested approximately \$37 million in innovative programs designed to prevent Ontario's children and youth from starting to smoke. That is what is within the purview of this ministry.

Our plan is working. In a 2007 survey by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 72% of students in grades 7 to 12 reported never—and I repeat, never—smoking a cigarette in their entire lifetime. That is 15% more students than from 2003.

Our plan is to help smokers quit and prevent other people from starting to smoke. Our plan is working, as many Ontarians have quit smoking. We continue to work with our programs to help people to quit and to help prevent people from starting to smoke in the first place.

That is what is within the purview of the Ministry of Health Promotion, and we continue to work on our programs and our initiatives aimed at getting people to quit smoking, getting people to recognize that tobacco is bad for their health. That is what we will continue to do so that generations to come will benefit from a smoke-free Ontario and the decisive actions of the McGuinty government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. It being past 6 o'clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1815.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Steve Peters

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

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Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Arthurs, Wayne (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
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Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (LIB)	London West / London-Ouest	Attorney General / Procureur général
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / Ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Brotten, Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Brown, Michael A. (LIB)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development / Ministre du Développement économique
		Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
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		Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
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Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (LIB)	Essex	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
		Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
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Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
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Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
		Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
		Minister of Revenue / Ministre du Revenu

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Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby—Oshawa	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (LIB)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora—Rainy River	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
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Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges—Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (LIB)	Brampton—Springdale	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	
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Murdoch, Bill (IND)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	
Naqvi, Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	

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Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches—East York	Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de parti reconnu
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First Session, 39th Parliament

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Première session, 39^e législature

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Journal des débats (Hansard)

Wednesday 22 October 2008

Mercredi 22 octobre 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 22 October 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 22 octobre 2008

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 21, 2008, on the amendment to the amendment to the motion by Mr. McGuinty to acknowledge the economic challenges facing the province and continuing to implement an economic plan.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. Frank Klees: In the time I have remaining, I would like to read into the record a very substantial plea from small business owners that was delivered to me by a representative of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. There are numerous such pleas signed by individual owners of businesses. It reads as follows:

"While Ontario businesses, including mine, struggle to cope with high fuel and energy costs, a strong Canadian dollar and intense foreign competition, we are further undermined by the heavy-handed, enforcement arm of government.

"Regulations continue to multiply, imposing ridiculous cost and use of time on small business. To make matters worse, more inspectors are imposing more fines, penalties and back charges against law-abiding businesses like mine, for their unintentional errors in dealing with outdated, confusing, or costly government rules.

"The Ontario government needs to boost business confidence in Ontario at this time, not drag it down! Aren't we all on the same Ontario team?!! Fines, penalties and back charges for rules I'm not aware of, should not be used to build government coffers. Let's redeploy enforcement staff to helping business owners reach the right side of the regulations:

"—Waive fines, penalties and back charges for first-time, innocent, non-compliance of government regulations;

"—Provide a single point of contact that can reliably inform me of all my obligations as a business owner in Ontario;

"—Train provincial inspectors to help small businesses deal properly with the rules, rather than slapping them with orders, fines, or penalties."

I have a number of these petitions that were delivered to me personally, and I know that other members of this Legislature have them as well.

No one is asking the government to compromise the health or safety of employees, no one is asking for a watering down of standards and no one is proposing that there should not be consequences for non-compliance with regulatory standards. What is being asked is that every citizen who interacts with government, including businesses, be treated with respect and civility. That's what we're calling for: Treat the citizens of this province with respect and civility.

The striking of a select committee, as we have been calling on the government to do, will be an important signal that the Premier, his ministers and this government respect this place, respect the Legislature and every member of this Legislature, because that will then legitimize the very debate the Premier has asked us to become engaged in, rather than have it rest as simply more political spin. Strike that select committee. Allow that select committee to travel the province, to invite people to come forward and present, as the federation of independent business is doing, so that we can hear what the practical solutions are and what the practical needs are for our communities. If the Premier and the finance minister are serious about their call to this Legislature and to members of this Parliament to provide them with meaningful input to help develop an action plan for Ontario as we move into very difficult financial times, then they will agree to strike a non-partisan select committee to deal with the issues before us.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'm delighted to join the debate on the economy. It is something, obviously, that impacts us all every single day, regardless of who we are or what our particular vocation is, so I'm really pleased to be able to stand in my place—in the peoples' place—to share a little bit about where we're at with respect to Ontario's economy.

I'm happy, frankly, because the commitments and progressive policies of the McGuinty government indeed have our province and this government in a position to weather the current economic storm, in spite of the ill winds that are blowing around the world right now. I think it could be said that there is arguably no jurisdiction anywhere in the western world that has equipped itself better to face any impending economic downturn than Ontario. As the Premier has often said—and I agree with

him—we took the time and were prudent enough to fix the roof while the sun was still shining. As one who has made the mistake, in the physical plant sense, of not having done that and borne the price of having to replace a wall and part of a roof, I know how important it is to do that. So we'll not only weather the storm and whatever it brings, but we intend to survive and thrive through whatever challenges we have.

We have a history of doing that. The pioneers would race to finish building a home so that the baby that was just born wouldn't freeze to death in the winter. We got through the Great Depression, as a people of faith who were able to work together to make the kind of difference together that we needed to do. We went to war to fight for freedom at home and to defend it abroad. I'm absolutely sure that we'll get through whatever is pending, whatever is on the horizon for us.

0910

And why is that? Simply put, it's because as Premier McGuinty has said so many times about fixing the roof—in addition to that, Premier McGuinty has been the first Liberal Premier to win back-to-back majorities in 77 years. There is a reason for that. The reason for that is that he gets it. He understands that better than any person I think I've ever met on the face of the earth. How's that for a starter? Nobody would remember the Good Samaritan if he hadn't had money. Remember the innkeeper, Cheri? The first thing the innkeeper wanted to see was the cash, right? So we can't stop and look over our shoulders and spot and respond to the needs of the vulnerable, be they seniors or folks who are sick and waiting for an operation, or the little boy in my riding who's got a learning disability—you name it—we can't do that unless we have a strong, prosperous and competitive global economy. We need to continue to work at that.

These are challenging times. Most of the challenges that we're facing today are, to be frank, out of our hands. The slumping US economy, high gas prices, the ups and downs of the Canadian dollar, sometimes we have a federal partner and sometimes we don't—more often—well, I won't go there. And so on. But you know what? We're going to come through these challenging times because our Premier and our government had a plan to deal with the short-term needs of the economy. You've perhaps heard it referenced in this House from time to time—the five-point plan. Has anybody heard about the five-point plan that we have?

Interjection: Tell us about the five-point plan.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I want to share a little bit about the five-point plan. The most important thing I need to say is that it was put in place before global forces changed our current economic landscape. But this five-point plan is still the right plan for us here in Ontario. Importantly, it shows and reflects the long-term vision that Dalton McGuinty has had for Ontario's economic future. First and foremost, this government's economic plan focuses on this province's greatest asset: our people. It's clear that our five-point plan will make—and is making—a real difference in the lives of people.

I need to just share with the assembly that one of the things that we do in my riding, the great riding of Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot—the riding with the longest name because our people have the biggest hearts and the biggest hopes and the biggest dreams—is we have a series of special advisory and listening groups: on the environment, on education and a new one on post-secondary education. We have a really important one that we meet with from time to time called our business advisory group. We hear a lot of thoughts about how we can assist the business folk in our riding—and across Ontario—and how we can change the business climate. I'm pleased to say that I had a very, very favourable response in seeing implemented many of the ideas that the entrepreneurs in my riding, those who work every single day to produce the wealth of our prosperous competitive global economy—the ideas that they have.

Our government, like no other government in Ontario history, is investing in people. We're investing in people by helping to retrain thousands of Ontario workers through the Second Career and other programs; programs, more frequently than not, that are in partnership with others, notably our union brothers and sisters in my beloved city of Hamilton: the carpenters and the steelworkers and the plumbers and joiners and steamfitters. We're working with them and they're growing up a whole new generation of apprentices who will secure those high-paying jobs and continue to, figuratively and literally, build our great province.

Right now, we're helping people who've lost a job get a new job with support for tuition, living expenses and transportation, linking them with the employers who need them. I could wax on eloquently about our investment in post-secondary education, the Reaching Higher plan, the single largest investment in post-secondary education in Ontario in the last 40 years. Over 100,000 new students, as a result of that recognition that they are our future, are in fact benefiting from a post-secondary education and will, in fact, be out there in the economy, earning the incomes that will ultimately protect us all. We have some 100,000-plus vacant high-skilled job openings in this province, jobs that are begging to be filled, but you can only fill them when you can train up a competent cadre of people to occupy those jobs. We have it right: We're working very, very hard specifically on that through the various programs that I've already mentioned and others.

Some of the research investments that we made with the new innovation centre—and again my beloved Hamilton, my alma mater, McMaster, voted, by the way, as one of the world's 100 best universities. We're working very, very hard with our Ontario public service, recently voted one of the 100 best employers in the country, and the other day, in Toronto Life, one of the top 70 in Ontario. First time in Ontario's—in Canada's history, actually—that a public service has been listed as one of the best 100 employers in Canada. I think we should be proud of that, particularly when we hear some others talking about how they sit around and breathe each

other's fumes, right? As if they—anyhow, enough; I think everybody gets the point.

We're also about lowering the cost of doing business through the province with specific business tax cuts and reductions. And I can assure those in the House that we are already feeling the positive impact of this approach in my riding. I hear from my colleagues all across the province: It's working. It's prudent, thoughtful, strategic intervention by a government that gets it and by our partners who are working, every single day, to build a stronger economy. Simply put, we're enhancing our competitiveness in order to give Ontario businesses a further advantage when they need it most, which is now. To accomplish this we're aggressively partnering with business all over the province to push our economy through these challenging times, and we're doing it now. We're not waiting; we're doing it now. We built that foundation and that foundation is bearing some fruit for us.

Furthermore, this government is investing in innovation, particularly when it comes to green technology and information technology, both of which will be key, as the Minister of Innovation knows all too well, to our continued successful participation in the global economy. In fact, we've gone from last to first in wind-generated energy and we're building the largest solar plant in North America. The green economy is coming upon us all fast. We can pursue no greater effort to help to strengthen our economy and to do our part to combat climate change than to understand and engage in this process. Our government has proven over and over again that it's keen and green—keenandgreen.ca; check it out.

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We were the first government to come to the table with funding to clean up that awful toxic mess in Hamilton harbour known as Randle reef. I don't even want to get into the greenbelt and the endangered species and the Clean Water Act and the clean air act and all the other things that have placed us as leaders in North America—world leaders.

Finally, we're making significant investments in Ontario's infrastructure with the help of our municipalities. The \$1.1 billion that some see as a trifle investment is in fact making a significant on-the-ground and in-the-ground difference. Infrastructure is important—roads and bridges, hospitals. Do you know, Minister of Health, our government has invested and is investing and currently has cranes putting together hospital and infrastructure in Hamilton alone worth over \$1.32 billion?

Hon. David Caplan: I knew that.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: You did know that.

Interjection: Billion or million?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Billion, with a "B."

Our investment will make our province more competitive, and the infrastructure investments are going to create, I'm told by the people who can advise us on that, about 11,000 new jobs. This work on bridges and our highways, our transit systems, is vital to our province in both the short and the long term, and an important employment initiative right now in Ontario.

Where I live and throughout the Hamilton area, people can already see the McGuinty economic policies working for them. My honourable colleague Minister Smitherman made note of this the other day, when he talked about the skyline changes in Hamilton and the kinds of investments we've made. He's right to be optimistic, and our friends across the aisle from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek and Hamilton Centre know in their heart of hearts that Hamilton and its people are an optimistic people; we're not a doom-and-gloom people. When you see the light at the end of the tunnel, you don't run out and order more tunnel.

Provincially, we've made record levels of investment in health care and education: the innovative McMaster-Mohawk bachelor of technology program, support for the new innovation centre and that new highway infrastructure that connects the inner city of Hamilton with the John C. Munro international airport—another great asset in our community. We've created 450,000 jobs in just four years, and 101,000 new jobs in the last year—more than any other jurisdiction in Ontario. I think, in fact, some 63% of all new jobs in Canada were created right here in Ontario. We generate 44% of the nation's wealth. We are equipped; our people are the highest-skilled in the world, and we're ready to compete with anybody.

In the Hamilton area, almost \$33 million has been invested in the Metrolinx program alone—thank you, Minister of Transportation, for that.

Our government also announced an early \$6-million investment to rehabilitate social housing units in and around Hamilton. We've reduced wait times at the Hamilton General Hospital and consolidated the acquired brain and injury rehab services from 14 different buildings to one focused site. And we're adding 44 beds and more efficient ambulatory programs to Hamilton General.

Meanwhile, my own alma mater, McMaster, remains an internationally recognized research facility, which this government is so proud of, and we've supported McMaster through a series of grants and other key investments.

One still very important manufacturing side of Hamilton's economic life which I need to note: Our city is ranked number seven among the best places to do business by Canadian Business magazine. Our new mayor raves optimistically—and appropriately—about the great future our city has and, by the way, about his willingness to partner with a progressive, pragmatic, prudent government to make Hamilton the best place in the world to raise a child, among other neat mission objectives.

The naysayers from across the floor and in Ottawa love to spread their partisan pessimism about businesses not investing in Ontario. Well, shame on them. You don't build Ontario up by ripping it, and its people, down. That's just not how it works. I also want to suggest that when they do this, they are spreading the same stuff that Ontario farmers spread on their fields, only thicker.

Speaking of farmers, let me just take a minute to talk about our agricultural sector. When you talk about the

importance of solar energy, nobody relies more on solar energy than our farmers. The sun shines down, the weather is good—if we don't manage to completely screw up the weather, the weather's good—the crops grow, and you've got a government that's prepared to partner with "Good Things Grow in Ontario." You're prepared to make the kinds of investments that need to be made in farmers' markets, in the wine industry, in corn support programs—the first jurisdiction in Canada to put that in place. Those are important.

Let me speak for a moment longer about Hamilton. ArcelorMittal is investing millions of dollars to upgrade the blast furnaces in its Hamilton operations, and we're pleased to be helping there. US Steel is making further investments in Hamilton at its Lake Erie operations. We welcomed Superior Boiler Works with a grand opening in October, and SFS intec and Bunge, which opened a new facility in July. Indeed, the Hamilton area is doing well under the McGuinty government, and with the help of the initiatives outlined in our five-point plan, we'll continue to hold our own and move forward through whatever economic challenges we have, not just surviving but thriving.

Finally, I want to say a quick word about our green procurement strategy in Ontario—the hybrid vehicles and the paper that we're purchasing. It all adds up to a cleaner, greener, keener, more competitive and welcoming Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I'm very pleased to rise today to enter this debate, because this afternoon at 3:15, Dalton McGuinty is going to announce Bob Rae II, the sequel. Following the lead of his Liberal Party cousin, Bob Rae, Dalton McGuinty is digging a big hole for our children's future. We call it "Dalton days." Get ready for it. Since he has been elected, Dalton McGuinty has incurred a total debt of \$20 billion. But every night he goes into our children's bedrooms and takes their piggy bank. He takes their future; he takes their money.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. I'd like to read a guest column I wrote for the Cambridge Times on March 13, 2008, some seven months ago. The headline is, "The Blame Game."

"I am seriously concerned about the future of this province. Without the present tax revenues, the level of benefits provided by the Ontario government to our citizens and the most vulnerable is in jeopardy.

"We know that the US is close to a recession and that Ontario will be adversely affected. A recession historically is a temporary condition, but it could accelerate the loss of manufacturing jobs in Ontario over and above the 200,000 lost during the last three years.

"Manufacturing job losses are at a new high, and companies are fleeing this province due to high taxes, unfair offshore competition and the high Canadian dollar. Korea just broke off negotiations with Canada after a futile attempt to reach an agreement to reduce Korea's unfair import restrictions. Both Democratic candidates in the

US, vying for the party's presidential nomination, have promised to reopen or abolish the NAFTA agreement with Canada.

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"In Canada, the high dollar could be a permanent condition known as the 'Dutch disease,' a name coined by The Economist magazine to describe the condition of the Netherlands in the 1970s. There, the discovery of natural gas drove the guilder to an artificially high valuation and made Holland's manufactured exports uncompetitive. Put another way, the Netherlands unexpectedly became poorer and not richer as a result of substantial energy exports. The Alberta oil sands resource is reputed to be the second-largest oil reserve in the world, next only to Saudi Arabia, and can be expected to provide oil for decades to come.

"Our dollar could continue to be artificially high permanently, to the detriment of manufacturing exports and jobs. Without the actions taken by the Netherlands and Norway under similar circumstances, Canada will be poorer and Ontario could be much poorer.

"Remedial actions, however, would require a coordinated approach of all parties, the Ontario and federal governments, unions and business, all working in partnership.

"However, I have not seen any indication by any of the parties of such a partnership. To the contrary, there is a constant pointing of fingers and blaming each other; no one taking responsibility for the problem.

"It's called the blame game.

"Without coordinated remedial action, Ontario will continue to lose high-paying export jobs, and will soon become a have-not province for the purpose of the Canadian government's equalization payments. From the economic engine of Canada for over a century to the poor man of Canada. I can only hope I am wrong."

That was written, as I mentioned, some seven months ago, and unfortunately, some of my greatest fears have come to fruition over the past couple of months. If I, as a backbencher without great resources, could conceive that there was a grave problem in March, why did Dalton McGuinty, with all the expert advice and opinions he has as the head of government, not know of the possible problems? The answer is: He was aware of the problems and concerns but chose to set up strategies to deflect the blame rather than meet the problems head-on. It's called "perception is reality."

The strategy of this government is to do nothing but blame others for failing their responsibilities. They blame former governments, the federal government, unions, banks, business and, of course, the citizens of Ontario themselves. You constantly belittle valid concerns raised by the opposition until it is too late, and now we face what could be the biggest economic downturn we've seen in the past 50 years. Dalton McGuinty could be remembered as the Herbert Hoover of Canada.

Has Dalton McGuinty finally awakened to the fact that Ontario's economy is in trouble? Has he finally decided to acknowledge the fact that more than 200,000 of our

residents have been laid off from manufacturing jobs since 2005? Mr. McGuinty, are you at last expressing a sliver of sympathy for the hard-working families of this province who cannot make ends meet? These people who have lost good-paying manufacturing jobs cannot, and likely will never, find jobs that pay comparable wages.

There was a study in the news just recently that in both Germany and Canada over the past few years there is a greater disparity between the rich and the poor. More of our citizens are leaving the middle class and, unfortunately, ending up in poverty. It is a serious matter when our middle class is attacked. Mr. McGuinty, do you ever wonder about the effects on families when a good-paying manufacturing job is replaced with a low-paying part-time job? Do you ever think about the stress it places on a marriage and the impact it has on young children? You have ignored these families and the challenges they face.

Many of the families I am referring to live in my riding of Cambridge. Five hundred of them worked at ClosetMaid, another 70 worked at Cambridge Stampings, while 550 worked at Image Craft, and most of those latter were women. I often wonder where those women turned for new employment and if they are earning a wage that allows them to live comfortably. This government washed its hands of these hard-working people.

Just last week, W.C. Wood, an appliance manufacturer in Guelph, announced a layoff of 148 workers due to the rising cost of raw materials and shipping. This is in addition to the 200 workers let go at W.C. Wood in 2006.

At Imperial Tobacco in Guelph, 555 people lost their jobs in 2006. These were good-paying jobs that allowed workers to give their families a good quality of life and a future. I wonder how they are coping today.

And the list continues. The remaining 500 workers at Kitchener Frame—formerly Budd automotive—have been told that the plant could close by Christmas. Let's remember the thousands of people who once worked at Budd and have since struggled to find other decent-paying jobs.

There are also 1,100 workers affected by the closure of BF Goodrich in Kitchener, 413 at La-Z-Boy in Kitchener, and 450 at NCR in Waterloo. Another 250 people at MTD Canada, in Kitchener, will be out of work at the end of the month when the production moves to the United States. Let's not forget the 314 hard-working people in my riding who lost their jobs at Tiger Brand Knitting in 2005.

This government has turned its back on the manufacturing sector of this province and instead chose to devote its time to feel-good pieces of legislation that do nothing to enhance the quality of life in this province. These laid-off workers needed your help long before now.

The Canadian Auto Workers estimate that 7,800 manufacturing jobs have been lost in Waterloo region since 2002. All of these families were living comfortably on decent salaries, only to have it all disappear in an instant. You offer little comfort to these people as they worry about losing their homes and their life savings.

According to a Toronto-Dominion Bank report, those who find new jobs experience a wage loss of 25%.

For the first time in 30 years, Ontario's unemployment rate exceeded the national average, rising to 6.5% in December 2007. Ontario's unemployment rate remains above the national average and is forecast by all major banks to stay that way through 2009. TD Bank Financial Group has said, "We anticipate further bad news in Ontario's employment pipeline over the next 18 months, with the jobless rate moving above 7% and personal income growth essentially stalling."

Announcing \$355 million in new spending for your Second Career strategy is too little, too late. This smoke-and-mirrors program will help only 20,000 workers, less than 10% of those who have been out of work since 2005. The program will also be of no use to people laid off before June 1, 2007. Those who have lost their jobs by that date will have already exhausted their unemployment insurance and are therefore not eligible for this program.

Mr. McGuinty, while you were busy enjoying the year-end spending spree and playing cabinet musical chairs, Ontario jumped on a fast-moving slope to becoming a have-not province. TD reported this year that Ontario will have this unfortunate distinction by 2010. We should have been debating this economic downturn before now. We should have been debating this six or seven months ago. We have called on you to stimulate our economy by reducing the tax burden on business and new business investments, eliminating capital taxes in Ontario, reducing taxes on small business, and initiating serious negotiations with the federal government on tax reform. You didn't listen, Mr. McGuinty. So now, instead of taking responsibility, you point the finger and the blame game begins.

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Your motion calls on the Ontario government to adjust its spending during these tight financial times. What an understatement. Since 2002-03, this government has increased spending by over \$27 billion for a total of \$96 billion. Total program spending has increased by nearly 50%, or \$28 billion, to \$87 billion today from \$59 billion in 2002-03.

It should be noted that the NDP government of Bob Rae only managed to increase total spending by 21% in five years. In the eight years of PC governments under Mike Harris and Ernie Eves, total spending increased by only 20%. Only former Liberal Premier David Peterson came close to this government's runaway spending when he increased spending by a record 45% in five short years.

So you've set records in spending, and I am concerned that you're about to set new records in our debt. You've already accumulated over \$20 billion since election, the carrying charges of which are over a billion dollars a year, and you've just started.

Not only is spending growing rapidly, but this government is consistently spending way beyond what it budgets from year to year. In 2007-08, this government raked

in \$5.6 billion in excess of revenue projections for that year, and \$4.1 billion of that revenue came from taxes.

We have encouraged you to tighten the reins on public sector hiring and labour costs. Since October 2003, Ontario has created more public sector jobs than any other province and has the second-lowest rate of private sector job creation. In fact, since October 2003, Ontario has created more public sector jobs than all the other provinces combined and nearly four times as many public sector jobs as Alberta.

Just last week, your government admitted that we should be prepared for a provincial budget deficit. Instead of using this unprecedented revenue to provide tax relief or pay down the debt, you went on a spending spree with taxpayers' money. Now you're about to do the same with our children's money. Now, interest on debt costs more than \$9 billion a year, which is just under \$25 million a day in interest repayment.

The pain caused by this economic downturn is widespread. Ontario housing starts declined by 27.8% in July to 59,200 units. Ontario recorded 68,123 housing starts, down 7.2% from 2006.

Over the first six months of this year, the value of Ontario international merchandise exports was down 12.9% from the same period in 2007. Over the first five months of 2008, Ontario wholesale trade was 2.7% lower than during the same period in 2007. Also, the first six months of this year saw Ontario manufacturing sales drop by 7.5%.

Your continued high taxes were counterproductive and discouraged investment by job producers. In the case of cigarette taxes, you have encouraged smuggling, and as a result, we see lower, not higher, revenues.

This government has actually increased the cost of doing business in Ontario.

Let's discuss the job-killing capital tax. Ontario would not have a capital tax today had the Liberal government not postponed the 2003 PC budget plan to fully eliminate it along the schedule of the federal government by January 1, 2008. The capital tax is widely acknowledged to be among the most inefficient forms of taxation and acts as a significant barrier to investment. The federal government eliminated its capital tax in 2006, two years ahead of schedule, and proposed incentives in the 2007 budget to encourage provinces to do the same.

While Dalton McGuinty has significantly increased the cost of doing business in Ontario, other provinces are moving in the opposite direction. For example, in 2001, British Columbia's newly elected Liberal government abolished the corporate capital tax over a two-year period and reduced the corporate income tax from 16.5% to 13.5%. The BC Liberal government's 2008 budget further cut the provincial corporate income tax rate to 11% on July 1 and to 10% in 2011. Of course, this makes them much more competitive than ourselves. Let's look at Saskatchewan in 2006. Saskatchewan's former NDP government reduced corporate income tax rates from 17% to 12% by July 1, 2008. By this same date, the government also phased out corporate capital tax for all

non-financial companies. Alberta eliminated corporate capital taxes and reduced the corporate income tax rate from 15.5% in 2000 to 10% in 2006. Manitoba, in 2007, reduced corporate income taxes from 14% to 13% effective July 1, 2008, to be further reduced to 12% on July 1, 2009.

Let's not fail to mention the red tape imposed by this government. Dalton McGuinty has done nothing to reduce the regulatory burden on business, which costs the economy an estimated \$5 billion annually. According to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, 2,212 Ontario businesses have said that the overall burden of provincial regulation has increased during the past three years. The 2008 Ontario budget introduced a cap-and-trade system for regulation, promising to eliminate a piece of regulation for each new regulation introduced. Essentially this means that for each regulation removed, a new one will be created, keeping the level of regulation constant. The Next Generation of Jobs Fund was launched on March 3, 2008, with a 45-day turnaround guaranteed. That was over 200 days ago, and we have since then heard of only one announcement of funding. Is nobody interested in this program, or is the government turning down applications it does receive?

Premier Dalton McGuinty, it's about time that you realize that many of the citizens and businesses of our province are in dire straits. Your motion asks that we acknowledge these tough economic times. We did that months ago.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Hon. David Caplan: It's indeed a pleasure to rise in this debate on behalf of the people of Don Valley East, whom I have had the privilege to represent in this chamber.

In listening to some of the earlier speeches, particularly from across the way, I think we're losing sight of what the motion actually says and what in fact we are here to debate. I would like to read that into the record so that members will understand, and that folks who are listening and watching at home will understand. The motion says:

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario acknowledges our province faces economic challenges created by the high dollar, high international oil prices, the US economic slowdown, international economic turmoil, and increased global manufacturing competition from China and India especially;

"That just as Ontario families do when finances get tight at home, the Ontario government should make adjustments as necessary to its finances while protecting our shared priorities, such as health care, education, the environment and public safety;

"That the investments made over the last five years in vital public services and Ontarians' key priorities like skills training, infrastructure, education and health care will help Ontario weather the economic challenges in the short term and emerge stronger than ever;

"And affirms our strongest possible support for Ontario workers and families and for a healthy, growing economy by continuing to implement the five-point economic plan that includes: investing in the skills of our people, making targeted tax cuts, investing in research and innovation, investing in infrastructure and partnering with businesses, while also expanding trade ties within Canada and internationally and seeking fairness from the federal government for Ontarians."

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That is what we are debating here, and it is indeed a pleasure to be here, because Ontarians, I believe, are well aware of the challenges our economy is facing. In fact, I hear from my neighbours in Don Valley East that they too are aware. I read in the newspapers daily about the economic concerns—not simply here in Ontario, because we are not an island unto ourselves; we are part of a larger country and part of a larger global picture. We're hearing and seeing these conversations played and re-played, indeed, across our continent and across other parts of the world. This is not simply an Ontario story, as I mentioned earlier. It's a topic of conversation, for sure, in Don Valley East, but it's a topic of conversation throughout our province, throughout our country and throughout North America.

Even the best economists, as wide opinions as you would have from them, would not have predicted a year ago that we would be here today. In fact, economists have revised their projections quite regularly over the course of the last number of months in response to the economic changes, in response to markets, in response to a tightening of credit and in response to many of these pressures under which they're finding themselves globally. A higher Canadian dollar has made business challenging for our manufacturers in particular, who in better times were able to export their goods at much more enticing prices for their clients. If you ask people in this chamber or people in Ontario, "What are some of the more export-oriented jurisdictions in the world?", somebody might say "Japan." In Japan, in fact, about 14% of their GDP, their gross domestic product—the services and goods they produce—is for export.

I want to compare that with Ontario. Ontario's exports as a percentage of our GDP are around 56%. More than half of what we produce in services and goods is a result of and for export markets abroad. Most of that, about 75%, is to the United States, mainly through the automotive sector. In fact, Ontario is the highest and most dependent export-oriented jurisdiction in the world. The change in the valuation of the dollar has made significant pressures and significant challenges. In fact, we've seen, very sadly: Hallmark, which is an employer in Don Valley East, has consolidated their operations. They've closed two plants in the United States. They've said that as a result of the change in the valuation of the dollar, they have decided to close their plant in my neighbourhood, and that's meant that 190 of my neighbours have lost their jobs. That's terribly tragic.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: What are you doing about it, David?

Hon. David Caplan: Hallmark confirmed that the services of a outplacement agency were secured to provide the needed adjustment services to the affected employees. Additionally—and I hear my colleague across the way say, "What are we doing about it?"—the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities, through the Toronto District School Board and through Service Canada, arranged for facilitators and public liaison officers to deliver a series of information sessions and supports for the employees back in June and July. Two outplacement agencies were enlisted by the company: Golden Mile Management for hourly employees and Equinox Consulting for salaried employees. These laid-off individuals will have complete access to Employment Ontario programs, including Second Career.

I'm going to be speaking about Second Career a little bit later in my remarks. But Second Career, just for your information, is an Ontario government program that offers training for new jobs and includes financial support. Second Career provides career planning and financial support specifically designed to help laid-off Ontarians participate in long-term training for a new job.

Of course, one of the areas—and one in fact that motion speaks to—is to seek fairness for Ontarians from our federal government. I haven't heard members across the way speak to the fact that an Ontarian receives about \$4,600 less per person than unemployed workers do in other provinces. An unemployed worker in Alberta, an unemployed worker in Quebec, an unemployed worker on the east coast of Canada receives more support from the federal government through employment insurance than an unemployed worker in Don Valley East does, than an unemployed worker in Kitchener–Waterloo, an unemployed worker in northern Ontario or an unemployed worker in Ontario, and that's shameful. That's about a \$2-billion discrimination against Ontario workers that exists that should not. This motion speaks to it and asks members of this Legislative Assembly to work together to address that.

I was speaking about the impact of the change in the Canadian dollar, but there are other impacts. The fast-rising and now fluctuating price of oil has increased the costs of running a business over the past number of months. Competition from overseas is truly ramping up. Truly, this is a much more globalized world when it comes to competition than our parents or our grandparents ever saw or ever could have imagined, and it is meaning those kinds of impacts in the communities that I had and continue to have the privilege of representing. My constituents want to know, what am I doing, what is this government doing in order to protect, in order to promote, in order to expand, in order to support them and in order to support our economy as best we can. I would say that by any measure, truly, truly this government has shown the kind of leadership that is necessary to be able to not only plan for and anticipate, which we have, but

also to be able to chart a steady hand through these turbulent times.

Last year, I had the privilege to be here as my colleague Minister Duncan gave a budget address to this assembly. The focal point of that budget was in fact in anticipation of what were shaping up to be some troubling economic times. There were some storm clouds on the horizon. Minister Duncan laid out the five-point economic plan for this province. There are five elements to it, and I'd like to articulate those and elaborate on those for the members present.

We must be competitive in our taxes. We must target tax cuts to be able to help. I heard the member from Cambridge speak earlier about capital tax. In fact, that's one of the taxes that was eliminated as a result of the work, the target and the focus—

Interjection.

Hon. David Caplan: My colleague the Minister of Research and Innovation points out quite rightly that members opposite voted against that measure.

We're investing in infrastructure. In fact, we're investing in infrastructure as we never have before: this year alone, \$9.9 billion. In 2003, when we saw a change in government, the government of the day was investing approximately \$2.1 billion in infrastructure. It was one of those areas, unfortunately, which did not receive the needed kind of support. Infrastructure has a doubly good effect. It promotes jobs and job growth in the short term and gets people working—particularly in the construction sector, but that means engineers and architects, lawyers, and a whole array of other professionals who support that work—but it also provides the long-term economic fundamentals that you'd want to have. We've seen the result of some of those infrastructure investments in Don Valley East. We've seen affordable housing projects like 121 Parkway Forest Drive, built as a result of a partnership between the city of Toronto, the province of Ontario and, yes, the federal government. When we do work together, we can provide affordable housing and the kinds of infrastructure projects that I think serve our communities very well.

The other elements: I mentioned that my colleague the Minister of Research and Innovation is here. In fact, that's another pillar of the five-point plan, because we have to be able to support the future economy, support the research that takes place today that allows us to invent marvellous new opportunities for entrepreneurs, and that starts with a culture of innovation, a culture of research and a culture of commercializing. We have a very good history, whether in the medical area, as we've seen in the discoveries of insulin or the manufacturing and the discovery of pacemakers—all Ontario inventions, all making tremendous differences in people's lives and also providing tremendous economic stimulus. There are two other elements that are equally important in that five-point plan. One is an investment in our people. In fact, that's the single greatest thing and the most important thing we could do.

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I would contrast the approach with my colleagues opposite. When they were in government, the first thing they did was cut half a billion dollars in our post-secondary sector. I've heard members opposite bemoan the fact that we're hiring teachers and nurses; that we should not be expanding these positions. In fact, their position was to cut those, and that has put not only our public services, but the people who depend on them, children, youth, adolescents—and the resulting turmoil that causes for future generations because they don't have the kind of support through our education system.

We must invest in our people to give them the opportunity to reach their potential so they can be the best they possibly can. I've been to many schools in Don Valley East and, in fact, Seneca College is there. I can tell you, that kind of programming and that kind of support have truly made a difference. Seneca College has a wonderful program with York University that allows students to move from practical to theoretical education and back again. It provides the kind of added value which is going to give those young adults the ability to get the best jobs. The best-trained people do get the best jobs.

Last but not least in the elements of the five-point plan is strategic partnerships with businesses, strategic partnerships with other levels of government, strategic partnerships with sectors right across the board. As we've discovered, we can do an awful lot on our own, but when we work together we are truly at our best. That has to be a culture. We have seen previously an approach which has worked to divide people, to exclude people. That's not the approach that gets us firing on all cylinders and helps us to realize the potential that we have. These are the elements of that plan.

I think people in Don Valley East understand that there are circumstances outside of the government's control. I mentioned the rising dollar, the global price of oil and intense global competition, but there are things that we can do to ensure that our economy emerges strong through these challenging economic times, and that's what the five-point plan is all about. I truly believe it is the right plan for the right times. Ontarians know that challenging times mean that we're making tough decisions, that sometimes adjustments will have to be made because of the changing financial circumstances. The families I know and my neighbours in Don Valley East at one point in their lives have been forced to make difficult choices when their circumstances have changed. I know that we will make the right adjustments, because this motion speaks about our core priorities. It talks about protecting health care and education, the environment and public safety, those things which truly on our own we would not be able to tackle. But collectively, through our cherished health systems and our local hospitals or community care, through our local schools, through our post-secondary endeavours, we are able to invest and support people.

I do want to have a bit of a contrast, because I think you've heard from across the way that my friends in the

official opposition do have a plan; it's a one-point plan. It's "Cut taxes and everything will take care of itself."

Hon. James J. Bradley: George Bush did that.

Hon. David Caplan: Look at what my colleague the Minister of Transportation says. Look at what happened when that philosophy was followed south of the border. We are seeing the results of a misguided plan that is focused only on one element, which was to provide indiscriminate tax relief. If you target it to the right people, if you target it to those who will really provide a stimulus, I think you're going to see a better result. But look at the results of what we saw eight years ago: 8,000 nurses fired. We saw thousands of teachers laid off. We saw water testing and meat inspectors cut. We saw—

Interjection.

Hon. David Caplan: My friend from Peterborough asks, "Well, what was the result?" We saw the tragedy of a town in Ontario, Walkerton—the result of the kind of philosophy that, in the words of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, turned their backs on public health.

There are differences in the times that were faced as well. I heard the member from Cambridge talk about the unemployment rate. The facts are that the unemployment rate was 7% under the previous government; it is currently 6.3%. So I think a one-point plan does not serve Ontario particularly well. In fact, a comprehensive plan focused on investing in our people, supporting infrastructure, research and innovation, having targeted business tax cuts but also in strategic partnership, is one that supports people.

I have also listened intently to members of the third party. They, too, have some ideas. One is the notion of a jobs commissioner. In other jurisdictions where this was tried, particularly in British Columbia, it did not work; it did not protect jobs. In fact, after a very short period of time, the government decided to abandon that, and rather, to adopt an approach very similar to the one that we've laid out.

I've heard as well a suggestion—and by way, I appreciate the suggestions of all members and the ideas that all members bring to this House. That's why it's important to have this debate: to allow members an opportunity to share their ideas and their perspectives, in the hope that we can come together to be able to support the people from the various neighbourhoods that we represent.

One of the ideas was to establish an industrial hydro rate. Interesting outcome, however: That would be to shift the burden of the cost of electricity from certain businesses onto the backs of residents. I don't know that that's necessarily a good idea, and I think that would place a burden on particularly our seniors, which would be an unfortunate one, and one that they might not be able to bear. I think that idea really needs some rethinking. I know that the leader of the third party has written a book where he has come out against that idea, so I'm very surprised that it has resurfaced.

Suffice to say the people of Don Valley East are well aware of the challenges that we face, and I hope aware—and I will do my best to make them aware—of the plan

we have laid out before them. But by working together, I know that we will be able to come through this challenging time stronger, and that when it is behind us—and I do hope it will be soon—we will be stronger for our collective efforts. I thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm certainly pleased to have the opportunity to speak on behalf of the people in the province of Ontario who, regrettably, today or last night, or as a result of the Premier's trip to Montreal, have learned that this province is now going to be facing a deficit. This is despite the fact that both the Premier and the Minister of Finance, as recently as one month ago and since then, have been predicting that, "All is well with the Ontario economy. The five-point plan is working. We still have the money in the reserve." We've now learned that that \$800-million reserve is gone, plus, the 40% increase in revenues that have accumulated over the past five years has been spent as drunken sailors would spend their money. People in Ontario woke up today to discover that we would have a deficit somewhere in the neighbourhood of about \$1 billion.

So I would say to you, this is a government who has pretended that all is well, and it is not so. It's not unlike the announcement they made in 2003, when the Premier said, "We will not raise your taxes, I promise you." What happened in the very first budget? They introduced the health tax—a health tax that has collected somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$12 billion.

Again, you can't trust this government. Even today, people are wondering, "What happened from one month ago to today? They tell us it's a billion-dollar deficit." The Premier is saying there won't be any new taxes, but at the end of the day, people know that they can no longer trust this government. In fact, I think what we've seen over the past five years is a government that had a tremendous amount of revenue, that has taken a \$5.6-billion surplus which has now become an apparent \$1-billion deficit in just one month. So how can you trust them?

1010

They're great at spending, and they're great at making all sorts of commitments, but I would say to you that today there's a lot of anxiety and there's a lot of stress in the MUSH sector: the municipalities, which have started their budgeting for the next year; the post-secondary sector—the universities, the colleges; the elementary and secondary panels; the hospitals and the long-term care.

The government has not lived up to their commitments. They've never been able to hire the first 8,000 nurses. They've never been able to eliminate the hospital deficits. They announce new wait times, which isn't new money; it's money they've taken back from hospitals that didn't manage to deliver the number of cases in the first six months of this year because there wasn't enough money for operating rooms, there wasn't enough money for beds.

So today the MUSH sector is feeling anxious and they realize that life is going to change in the province of Ontario. Despite the promises that have been made by this government, they are feeling anxious and they're feeling stressed. This government has a tremendous amount of explaining to do.

This motion, by the way, is not any attempt on the part of the government to elicit advice or to work in co-operation. It was simply an attempt to put forward their five-point plan. It's a farce, as far as asking the opposition parties for their input, because day after day we sit in this House and we hear the government put us down for any suggestions that we do make. They're not prepared to incorporate. They're not prepared to listen. For example, we recommended that they make some changes to the apprenticeship ratios, but we get put down. We asked them to review this decision they're making to put more of a financial burden on the small business sector by starting to use those people as another source of revenue for the WSIB. We asked them about looking at the whole tax environment. Roger Martin has certainly told us that our taxation system needs to be reviewed and there are lots of flaws. This motion that the Liberal government of Dalton McGuinty has put on the table is not an attempt to get the best ideas from the opposition parties. It's simply an opportunity to tell the people of Ontario falsely, at this point in time, that a Liberal plan is working, when we know it's not. In fact, we have suggested that if the government were really interested in listening to the opposition parties, they had an opportunity to do that.

Yesterday, we introduced an opposition day motion asking for a select committee which would have offered a totally new approach. It would have charted a new course at a time of economic uncertainty, at a time when we've seen the loss of at least 230,000 jobs, jobs that are creating pain and hardship for the people who have lost them and for their families.

We have Don Drummond predicting that this province could lose another 250,000 jobs in the next five years if the Liberal government doesn't make changes. That's a possible half a million jobs that could be lost. You compare that to our government: During our time in office, we created the economic environment—with the help of the private sector, who are the individuals that create the jobs. Governments don't create jobs. Jobs that they create are paid for by the taxpayers. You need the private sector jobs. We saw the creation of one million new jobs, and that was because of the economic environment we created. We picked up the pieces from the devastation that was left by the Liberals under David Peterson and the devastation of Bob Rae, where we saw the loss of 10,000 jobs in the province of Ontario. We decided that we would work with business, we would work with labour, we would work with the private sector, and we would create the environment that would encourage individuals to come to this province and create new jobs for our people.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 8(a), this House is in recess until 10:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: It's my pleasure to welcome to the House the members of the Hamilton AM Rotary Club, which I'm a member of.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I'm pleased to introduce the students from Mr. Fletcher's grade 5 class from Alexander Stirling Public School, in my riding of Scarborough—Rouge River, which is visiting the Legislature today.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I'd like to welcome the presence of our sign language interpreters this morning in the Legislature for the first time. This is indeed a historic day, and certainly most welcome.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I would like to welcome in the House today the Canadian Hearing Society. They do tremendous work for those who have hearing impairments. Especially I would like to recognize former MPP Gary Malkowski—Gary, welcome to the House—who has been a great advocate for the hearing society.

Mr. Jim Wilson: It gives me great pleasure to welcome to Queen's Park today Linda Strevens and her niece Candice Skelton. Linda was crazy enough to participate in one of those bids to have lunch with your MPP at Queen's Park. She won't tell me how much lunch was worth, but the proceeds went to e3 Community Services. Thank you, Linda.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I want to welcome grade 5 students from William G. Davis Junior Public School from the great portion of the Scarborough East part of my riding.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Also, we'd like to welcome, on behalf of the member from Welland and on behalf of page Faye Campbell, her mother, Kim Meade, in the public gallery today.

Also, we'd like to recognize, as has been done already, Gary Malkowski, the member from York East in the 35th Parliament, in the east members' gallery. Welcome, Gary.

Joining us as well today will be Derek Fletcher, the former member for Guelph, also in the 35th Parliament.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I want to introduce Carly Jones from Parkdale—High Park.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to recognize Nancy Frost, Murray Pollard and Rex Banks from the Canadian Hearing Society, who are here today in the gallery.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is for the Premier. It deals with sincerity and motivation, and what

the Premier says and what he means. He's used the words, over the past few weeks of the crisis, "emergency" and "co-operation." He's talked about co-operation with the federal government and colleagues across the country, and we have to assume he meant within this chamber as well, but his actions belie those words. Yesterday, this House had before it a motion that would have established a select committee with equal representation from all parties in this House, based on the structure used in the past with the Select Committee on Alternative Fuel Sources—non-partisan and looking towards the best interests of this province.

I ask the Premier: If he's sincere about looking toward co-operation across the aisle, why did he order his members to vote against that motion?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Order.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to say again that nobody, certainly in this Legislature, has a monopoly on good ideas. We aren't suddenly vested with wisdom simply because we sit at the right-hand side of the Speaker. I remain very much open to good ideas that might be forthcoming from my colleagues on all sides of the House. I appreciate some of those that have already been put forward—some of with which I profoundly disagree—but we remain open to good ideas from all Ontarians as part of the preparation for our budget. There will be a committee that will be consulting Ontarians broadly and I fully expect that the members of the opposition will want to contribute to that process as they usually do.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: "We're open as long as you do it our way" is really the bottom-line message from the Premier's response.

We've talked about this in terms of the cynicism of the public with respect to looking at this Legislature and its inability to find ways—primarily because the Premier and his colleagues sincerely do not want to work with either opposition party—to address the challenges facing this province.

We have to question the Premier's commitment as well when he tabled this so-called emergency motion on the issue of the economy. I think it was the next day that he left for Mexico. We find out now that this Friday, when we're having an economic update which will lead to a deficit, he's leaving for China. Does he think that's—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Premier?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: Shame on you, Bob.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Notwithstanding the thrust of my honourable colleague's question, I believe that he believes it's appropriate and, indeed, a principal responsibility of the Premier to reach out and establish stronger trade ties with other parts of the world. About 84% of our exports go to the United States of America. That's great and we've got a powerful alliance, economic in nature, with the US, but the most basic advice that you get from

financial advisers is that you have to diversify your investments.

The member knows that I was in Mexico to work hard to land the 2015 Pan Am Games, which represents a \$2-billion economic investment for Ontario. I'm off to China, obviously, to enhance trade ties—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Premier. Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: The Premier has used the words "emergency" and "crisis" to describe the challenges facing the province of Ontario. The definition of "emergency" is "an event requiring immediate action," yet his immediate action is to hop on a plane and head to the Far East. I think that sends out all of the wrong messages to the people of this province.

We had an opportunity yesterday to send a very clear message that we're going to work together to find answers, to meet these challenges, yet again he orders his colleagues to vote against a very sensible, reasonable opportunity to reach across the aisle and find answers that we can all agree upon to answer the challenges of this province.

I ask the Premier again about his sincerity with respect to making this decision. We're not asking him to cancel his trip to China. We're asking him to take a look at delaying it to at least deal with the fallout from the economic statement we're going to be hearing later this afternoon.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate that my honourable colleague has a real interest in the economic state of affairs of Ontario and a desire to make a contribution to the solutions. There are a number of means by which he can do that. One of those is what he's doing right now, putting questions to me and hopefully offering positive, constructive suggestions. That we're having an economic debate in this House now is an opportunity for every member to make a contribution.

We're going to have an economic statement delivered in this House this afternoon. Members of the opposition will have an opportunity to respond to that. There will be a budgetary process which enables all of us to make a contribution to the strengthening of our economy. There are a number of venues and avenues and possibilities for members opposite and we will continue to remain receptive to good ideas, notwithstanding what political—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Premier. New question?

1040

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: To the Premier—you have to wonder why he went to the expense of creating a new Ministry of International Trade when he's having to do her job instead of staying here and addressing this economic crisis.

I want to ask the Premier about something his finance minister said in this House on September 25. That's less than a month ago. He said the budget would be balanced,

even with the downturn in the US economy. He said, and I'm quoting your finance minister, "We built in reserve and contingency at all levels of the budget." Premier, how is it that just four short weeks ago the budget was balanced, but today there's going to be a deficit of almost \$1 billion?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I don't know where my colleague is getting his numbers. I think we should just wait until the Minister of Finance provides us with his fall economic statement. I think it's important again to note, though, that we're in a pretty good position now to withstand these powerful winds that are blowing out there, and as I argued yesterday, we have done much to fix the roof while the sun was shining.

Now, my colleague opposite may call these kinds of things waste, but I think there's a certain element of wisdom in the kinds of investments that we've made. If we look at education alone, we've got 100,000 more young people in our colleges and universities, 50,000 more people enrolled in apprenticeships and 10,000 more young people graduating from our high schools. We have smaller classes and higher test scores. That's a good investment, it's a wise investment and it's the kind of thing that will help us withstand these powerful economic winds.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I think we have a different view with respect to the past five years and the place this government has put us in, in terms of our ability to weather the economic storms that we're going to be facing.

With respect to the comments made by the Minister of Finance, I would think that if he were a financial adviser, you would be firing him if you were his client, based on his management of the portfolio.

Words like "fiscal responsibility" and "prudence" aren't handy sound bites for tough times. Premier, you, in reality, have blown the bank. You've been asking Ontarians to tighten their belts. Yesterday and today they're hearing their cities, towns, schools and hospitals won't get the funds they've been promised, and that is creating significant anxiety. We're getting calls. Why aren't you staying in Ontario to reassure families, hospitals and schools that they won't see cuts to their—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: A couple of things on that score: My honourable colleague belonged to a government which not only saddled Ontarians with a \$5.6-billion deficit, but they were in power for—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Order.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: They don't like to remember this, but they were in power for eight years, and during that time they ran five deficits. The price of oil was low, the Canadian dollar was low and the US economy was firing on all eight cylinders. They had the best of times and they ran, out of eight years, five deficits. I would

suggest they don't have the best pulpit from which to sermonize.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Any objective review of the record would indicate otherwise, and the Premier simply doesn't want to answer the questions with respect to his failed management of the economy over the past—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. This is an important series of questions that the honourable member is asking, and I would just want to make sure that the Premier can hear the questions. With all the heckling behind the Premier, I'm sure it's difficult for him, so I'm sure the Premier would appreciate your support.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: —not to mention one million new jobs created under the former government.

Four weeks ago, the finance minister said it was all sunshine and roses, things were great. Today it's doom and gloom, tighten your belts, and the sectors that provide services that people rely on—hospitals, schools, cities and towns—are told there's no more money. That's a shock to the system, and you have an obligation, I would think, in terms of your office, to get out there and explain to the people of this province how you—you—allowed that to happen. You don't go off to Mexico and China; you lead from the front of the battlefield, you listen, you show you care, and you reassure them that you're going to do something for them, right now, to make things better.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I would just remind my honourable colleague of something he said as Minister of Economic Development and Trade. He said, "As Ontario companies sell more to foreign markets, they make our province more competitive and our future more secure. That's why we continue to aggressively build on our global strategy."

My colleague was right then, and it speaks to the importance of us—that while we take the necessary steps here at home to manage our finances, we also continue to reach out as aggressively as we possibly can. I'm off to China shortly. I'll be spending two weeks there. I'll be joined by four other Canadian Premiers when I'm abroad; I'll be accompanied by a couple of dozen environmental technology businesses from Ontario. China is looking for solutions to its pollution problems. We've got those solutions; we're going to sell those solutions to them and create jobs here.

POVERTY

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question, of course, is for the Premier. One year ago, the McGuinty government, with much noise, promised a strategy to reduce poverty in Ontario. A year has now passed, and the promised strategy has been announced and re-announced, most recently in the 2008 budget, but there has been precious little in the way of new money to fight poverty in

Ontario. Instead, the Premier now utters hints that the poverty reduction program, announced and re-announced—mostly recently in the 2008 budget—might be cut or delayed.

My question is this: Will the Premier assure those people, hard-pressed, fighting poverty in Ontario today that there will be no stalling or cancelling of the government's much-announced and re-announced anti-poverty strategy?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It is true we have made some announcements when it comes to addressing poverty, but we have yet to announce our strategy. My honourable colleague knows that the commitment we have made was to put that out by the end of December. We intend to do that. He knows, as well, that we're going to do something that has not been done before: We're going to put in place some indicators that tell us what is the true state of poverty in Ontario. We'll put in place targets, and we'll hold ourselves to account for meeting those targets, and we'll put in place a strategy to help us achieve those targets. That's an important part of our announcement to come in December. We've taken a number of other steps along the way, and of course, we intend to continue to follow through with those steps.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: Talking about indicators and talking about more studies isn't going to do anything about poverty. We already know, for example, that social assistance rates under the McGuinty government in Ontario today are at the same level they were in 1990. Meanwhile, the hydro bill has skyrocketed, the heating bill has skyrocketed, the food bill has skyrocketed and the rent bill has skyrocketed. This business of talking about poverty isn't doing anything to fight poverty.

One of the things that the Premier mentioned and promised in the election campaign was a dental program. A year later, not one red cent has been put forward for a dental program for low-income people who fight and struggle with dental illness. I want to ask the Premier what's his response to people like Charles, from Niagara, who has to have two teeth extracted and two root canals but can't afford a dentist?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We've taken a number of steps, and we look forward to taking more. In addition to the investments that we've made in our schools and in our health care system, which benefits all Ontarians of all economic backgrounds, we've also continued to invest in enhancing the quality of our social services. In particular, we're very proud of our Ontario child benefit. It didn't exist before; we created that, we invented that. At present, it pays \$600 to families with children—we're benefiting 1.3 million children. That will grow to \$1,100. We have in fact raised the minimum wage now, on a number of occasions.

There are a number of other things we can do and that we look forward to doing in the future, but I think the most important thing we will do as a government is put forward a comprehensive strategy to be announced in December.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The Premier talks about minimum wage. The fact is, the minimum wage in Ontario today is a poverty wage. Workers in Ontario, most of whom are women who work for minimum wage, continue to live in poverty. The Premier talks about the child benefit. The child benefit is not going to do anything meaningful until 2011 or later. In fact, today, when it's a very cold day, low-income kids in Ontario will not get a back-to-school clothing allowance because the McGuinty government has taken that away.

I say to the Premier, you talk, talk, talk about poverty. Meanwhile, more people are falling into poverty. When is the McGuinty government actually going to do something about poverty? You said you didn't have time when Ontario's economy was doing well. Now that Ontario's economy is not doing well, are you still saying to people living in poverty that you don't have time for them, that they have to wait, wait, wait?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We've taken a number of steps forward to deal with poverty, and we look forward to doing more. We will be speaking to that in a more fulsome way in December, when we announce our comprehensive plan to address poverty.

For observers, it's important to understand that we've got the Conservatives saying we shouldn't be running a deficit, we've got the NDP saying we need to find ways to spend more. There is an element of truth in the position put forward by both sides. Our job on this side is to find a way to reconcile those competing interests. It's to find a way to deal with all those demands, to make advances on the poverty front, to act in a way that is fiscally responsible, to protect health care and education, and we will do that. I'll tell you why I'm so comfortable and more confident with this: It's because we allow ourselves to be continually inspired by the values of Ontarians.

POVERTY

Mr. Howard Hampton: Once again to the Premier: The Premier wants to talk about nebulous things like values at a time when hundreds of thousands of people are losing their jobs and many hundreds of thousands more are falling into poverty. We don't need lectures about values, Premier. We need action from a government that has promised over and over again to do something.

Here is the reality: Economic times are tougher, a lot tougher. The McGuinty government has a choice—to continue to talk but do nothing, or show up for those people who are most in need and for those people who now need the help of government more than ever. Which is it going to be, Premier? More talk about values, more promises and promises and promises, or is the McGuinty government actually going to show up for the people who need help—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the representations being made by my colleague the leader of the NDP. Again, there is real legitimacy to some of the points he is making. We are going to find a way to balance those representations with those made by my colleagues found in the Conservative Party, with those stakeholders who are found in the education community, with those who are found in the health care community, with those businesses that would argue that their levels of taxation are too much of a challenge for them. We are going to find a way to reconcile all those competing interests and do it in a way that is in keeping with Ontario values.

They want us to make some progress, but they don't want us to do it in a way that compromises our fiscal strength tomorrow. So we can't do it all at once. But we will find a way to protect our public services, we will find a way to make some advances on the poverty front, and we will find a way to ensure that we can turn to Ontarians and say we protected—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Premier. Supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: A minute ago, it was talk about values. Now it's talk about competing interests. For five years, Premier, you told the lowest-income Ontarians to wait. They weren't important enough during five years of good economic times. For five years, you told people who were losing their jobs that they weren't important enough for your government to take action.

Now your answer seems to be, when the economy is rough, that those people should continue to wait. Well, if low-income people are told to wait when the economy is good and now you're telling them to wait when the economy is bad, when do low-income people really matter to the McGuinty government? Obviously, not in good times, and not in bad times either.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My colleague is nothing if not creative. We have never said that the poor are going to have to wait. We've said that we're going to have to wait until December until we make public our strategy to address poverty. But we've moved all along during the course of the past five years, whether you're talking about our new Ontario child benefit, increases in the minimum wage—my friend says that they're not enough, and I understand that, but we've got to bring some balance to these issues. We've moved ahead with social assistance rates. We've invested in affordable housing. We've doubled the student nutrition program in our schools. So the fact is we've moved along in a progressive way and in a thoughtful way and in an affordable way, and we will continue to do so. Again, the big announcement on the poverty front comes in December, in keeping with our commitment.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Premier, here is the problem: Your government continues to say, "Wait, wait, we'll

maybe do something sometime in the future." In the meantime, conditions grow worse every day. Some 240,000 good-paying jobs have been lost in Ontario over the last three and a half years under the McGuinty government. Many forecasters say another quarter million good jobs will be lost because your government doesn't have a plan. The OECD says that poverty is getting worse in Ontario; in fact, there are more kids coming to school hungry; in fact, there are more people struggling to find an affordable place to live.

Premier, all you've done for the last year is talk, talk, talk, as the situation grows worse. When are we going to see some bold action from the McGuinty government to take on these problems, or are we simply going to get more talk, talk, talk?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The leader of the NDP may see our new Ontario child benefit as talk, but I think it's something that is pretty substantive and pretty helpful to low-income households. The fact that we've increased the minimum wage several times—again, he may consider that talk, but I consider it pretty substantive. The same thing, I would suggest, applies to our increases in social assistance, affordable housing, our dental program, our student nutrition program, our new parent and family literacy centres, and the work that we're doing with respect to our overall poverty strategy.

I understand my friend's impatience and I can appreciate his single-mindedness on this, but we need to bring a comprehensive view on this side. We've got to reconcile all of these competing demands for new investments, and we will find our way through this together.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is to the Premier. Just a few months ago, Premier, your government was boasting about a \$5.6-billion surplus and an \$800-million contingency fund. That's a total of \$6.4 billion. Now we're hearing today that you could be running a billion-dollar deficit. That's a difference of \$7.4 billion. Premier, where did that money go? You knew there was trouble ahead; why didn't you plan for it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I think a bit of compare and contrast is really helpful here. During their eight years in government, they had the best of times. Throughout, they had a low cost of oil and a low Canadian dollar and a US economy firing on all eight cylinders, but notwithstanding those good eight years, they ran five deficits, including a \$5.6-billion hidden deficit with which they saddled our government. We took a couple of years to come out from under that, and we managed to balance our budget two years in a row now. So in terms of comparing and contrasting, we've done what we could, we think, in a responsible way and at the same time made significant new investments in public services which families need to be able to count on.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I take it that the Premier doesn't know where the \$7.4 billion is. I would point out to him

that we inherited a \$12-billion deficit from the NDP and it took us a few years to correct that. I'd also point out, Premier, that the deficit you inherited—

Interjections.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Perhaps you could bring the children to order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Order.

1100

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I'd point out also that the deficit you say you inherited—you were in power for six months during that period of time. That deficit was at least half yours and you never put out one restraint order to the civil servants. Premier, do you have any idea where that \$7.4 billion really is?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think we're making some progress here: We had an acknowledgment of their deficit. But they've only acknowledged half of it, so we'll keep working on that.

What else have we done in order to fix the roof while the sun was shining, you might ask? We have 8,000 more nurses working in Ontario. We've got doctors for 630,000 more Ontarians. We have over 100 hospital construction projects underway and we've got wait times down. Again, good investments, wise investments, made on behalf of Ontario families.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My question is to the Premier. In the face of this economic downturn, you should not expect students to pay higher tuition fees. It lacks vision to raise tuitions when our economic future rests on an educated workforce. It's like taxing a service that you want people to use. It lacks economic focus to force large debts on recent graduates. They should be buying houses or purchasing green cars instead of paying down huge loans. It lacks general common sense to put the weight of the economy on the shoulders of the young who are just starting out. When will you stop reaching deeper and deeper into the pockets of students to pay for post-secondary education?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. John Milloy: I think that members on all sides of the House appreciate the challenges facing students. I was very proud that the Reaching Higher plan devoted \$1.5 billion specifically targeted for student assistance.

But let me share a few facts with the honourable member on where Ontario stands. Ontario students receive the highest amount of needs-based assistance of any province in Canada. Ontario students currently receive the highest level of non-repayable assistance than ever before. We've doubled our investments in student aid since 2003-04. We're helping 150,000 students per year with financial assistance and we've tripled the number of grants available to students. In fact, one in four students, approximately 120,000, receive non-payable grants under the Reaching Higher program.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Minister, when you said "reaching higher," did you mean higher as in the second-highest tuition fees in the country, according to Statistics Canada? When you said "reaching higher," did you mean last in per capita funding? And when you said "reaching higher," did you mean reaching deeper into the pockets of students? Please stop reaching higher. The higher you reach, the worse the problem gets.

Student debt is a fiscal problem, not a solution. What's your economic response to the massive debt problem you are creating for our youth?

Hon. John Milloy: I'd like to go on to list some more facts for the member. We've increased OSAP maximums by 27%—the first time in 12 years. We've limited students' annual repayable debt to \$7,000 through the Ontario student opportunity grant. The Ontario student access guarantee means that no qualified student will be prevented from attending public colleges and universities due to a lack of financial support.

Maybe I should share statistics about their time in power. The NDP cut student aid by nearly 50%. They cut funding to post-secondary education. Mr. Speaker, you may remember that they promised to eliminate tuition, then freeze it; instead, they increased tuition fees by 50%.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE DISABLED

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. As you are already aware, today at Queen's Park members from the Canadian Hearing Society are here to raise awareness of issues facing the deaf, deafened and hard-of-hearing community in Ontario.

As a member of a family that has experienced the difficulties associated with hearing loss, it's important to me that all of us become more educated on the needs of the hearing-impaired and that we as a society can do more to improve and enrich the lives of those suffering difficulties from hearing loss.

For many families in Pickering-Scarborough East, the Canadian Hearing Society has worked hard on their behalf to ensure they have access to the many community services that are there to benefit them. I've heard you speak many times, Minister, of improving the lives of the vulnerable in Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I would like to thank the member from Pickering-Scarborough East for his excellent question. For over a decade, supports for individuals with disabilities in this province were allowed to languish under previous governments. The McGuinty government has dedicated itself to moving forward and making this province fully accessible. Not only have we passed the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, but we have also increased funding for organizations such as the Canadian Hearing Society. For example, in 2007 we announced that more than \$20 million would be invested to improve services, including agencies providing inter-

preter and intervener services. We have also provided funding for costs that may include wage increases, legal obligations and other cost-of-living increases. In 2006, we gave another \$11 million in additional funding, and it was—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I know that in my riding of Pickering-Scarborough East, the needs of the hearing-impaired are forever growing, and this increase in funding is most welcome. Can you tell us what difference this funding has made to the staff and clients of the Canadian Hearing Society?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: What I can tell this House is that our government's funding increases are helping to provide more services to people who need them in both English and French, improve wages to attract and keep people who provide interpreter services, and improve the quality of services. The McGuinty government has continued to support the Canadian Hearing Society and organizations like it because we genuinely believe in an inclusive society. We have committed Ontario to becoming fully accessible by 2025.

Nous travaillons et nous collaborons avec les organismes sur le terrain parce que notre objectif est le même : faire de l'Ontario une province entièrement accessible pour tous les Ontariens et Ontariennes.

At the end of the day, a more accessible Ontario is a stronger, healthier and fairer Ontario.

TRANSFER PAYMENTS

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is for the Premier. Yesterday, you shared with the media information regarding the fact that promised spending increases or new projects for the MUSH sector would probably be deferred, put on hold, and there would be a further review of spending for the MUSH sector. You can imagine that it has struck some fear in the hearts particularly of the health sector. I just want to ask you today, are you and will you be living up to your commitment to provide each person in a long-term-care residence with the \$6,000 that you promised back in 2003, and in particular, the comfort allowance that you have promised for this year?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm not going to speak to specific details. I'll allow the Minister of Finance to do that. But what I want to draw to your attention are the mixed signals we're getting from the Conservatives. On the one hand, they're saying that we should shun a deficit at all costs, and yet this honourable member is now asking that we ensure that we find a way to make investments in certain kinds of programs.

What we want to do, when it comes to new programs—it's very important that we take the time to find a way to defer it or slow that down, if at all possible. When it comes to existing programs, there's going to be less money for next year than we had originally anticipated. I think Ontarians understand why. We're going to have to

call upon all of our transfer partners to work with us as we manage our way through this. I'm confident, though, given the temporary nature of this global economic downturn, that we can take the interim steps to preserve our fiscal integrity.

1110

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Let me set the record straight. We have made no comments whatsoever about a deficit. It is you, Premier, who has indicated that you are going to be running a deficit.

But I can tell you that people in long-term-care homes are very concerned. They need more personal care. It's not being delivered.

The other sector that is very concerned are the hospitals. Half of them currently have a deficit. They've had to close beds. There is not enough operating time to meet the wait time demands that are placed upon them. I'm asking you today, are you going to be reducing hospital funding and are you going to be putting their capital projects on hold?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure.

Hon. George Smitherman: I do want to say to the honourable member that she covered quite a bit of ground there. The Premier has already made comment about the way that the Tories have got these issues surrounded, being on both sides: restraint on the one hand and more spending on the other.

With respect to capital, I think it's important to note that while we have had to delay very modestly the emergence of some planned capital projects, it's only as a matter of prudence for the taxpayers because we don't have the sufficiency of skilled trades to be actually doing the bidding. We're making sure that we have a competitive process that gets value for the money.

It is, in a certain sense, a complication from having had so much ambition with respect to the rebuilding, the renaissance of the hospital infrastructure in the province of Ontario in Halton, Markham and other communities—small delays that will see the emergence very, very soon of multi-hundred-million-dollar new hospitals as part of our ongoing commitment to health care, which stands in contrast to their plan to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Mr. Peter Tabuns: This question is for the Minister of the Environment. Yesterday, the Environmental Commissioner's annual report revealed serious shortcomings in the government's response to water, air quality, biodiversity and other environmental issues. He said the greatest problem with the environmental assessment process was that the process was broken. Environmentally significant projects like Ontario's integrated power supply plan are being excluded—have been excluded—

from environmental assessment. When will you reform the system and ensure that all significant programs, including the integrated power supply plan, go through an environmental assessment?

Hon. John Gerretsen: First of all, we thank the Environmental Commissioner for his annual report. There are a lot of good suggestions in there and we certainly take everything he says in there very seriously and we're looking into many of these matters.

But let me just remind the member as to some of the other things the Environmental Commissioner said yesterday. For example, he said on page 27 that he "commends the Ontario government for creating this action plan on climate change. Without a plan, governments have no way of measuring achievements, contextualizing their efforts in any given area and reporting progress." Now, this is the plan that this member has always been complaining about over the last year, and the Environmental Commissioner actually compliments us on that.

Let's hear what he says about water management. He says he is "pleased to note a number of recent positive changes to water management policies and practices in Ontario which will aid in adapting to current and future hydrological changes."

There are positive, good suggestions—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Minister, what part of "broken" don't you understand? It's very simple. You have a situation where land purchases and rezoning go ahead before an environmental assessment process is completed, essentially making the process a rubber stamp. You have a situation where since 1996 only two of 64 projects have been rejected. You're telling me that people come forward with perfect projects more than 98% of the time? What are you going to do to correct a broken system? When are you going to bring forward the reforms that we need?

Hon. John Gerretsen: Certainly, any system that has been around for 20 years can always be looked at. I can tell the member right now that we are seriously looking at the whole environmental assessment process and the way it's currently set up. But I can also tell him that when it comes to transit, for example, we've implemented a six-month transit environmental assessment in order to make sure that those 52 projects that are currently on the books and the \$17.2 billion that we're going to invest in transit in Ontario are going to happen because transit is a good thing from an environmental viewpoint. The more people we can get on transit and out of their cars, the better it is.

We are looking at the system, we can always make improvements, and I can assure the members that in the times to come we will have a better, more efficient and more environmentally sound environmental assessment process.

CHILD POVERTY

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: My question is for Minister of Children and Youth Services. For Hamilton and Hamiltonians, community is paramount. We recognize that community is at the heart of our success, and it is something to which we are deeply committed. There are guests with me today who represent that commitment to Hamilton's community and especially to our children who live in poverty. Members of the Rotary Club of Hamilton AM, which I am a proud member of, have come to represent their dedication to community. For example, they played a central role in organizing and raising money for a project to provide barrier-free access to the Jamesville Community Centre.

Could the minister tell us how community groups will be included in the fight against child poverty in Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: First let me thank the member from Hamilton Mountain and welcome the Rotarians to the Legislature today. Rotarians have a presence here every day. Not only is my colleague from Hamilton Mountain a proud member but also the father of my colleague from Perth-Wellington, Wilf Wilkinson, has just completed his term as president of Rotary International.

We recognize that there are things that we as a government can do and will do to reduce poverty, but to make real progress we need all hands on deck. Many of the very best solutions are found not here at Queen's Park but in the community and in our neighbourhoods. That's why community organizations like Rotary Club are so important. Their work, such as ensuring barrier-free access to community centres and supporting our children's treatment centres, helps ensure that everyone has an opportunity to achieve their full potential. Hamilton is a leader in poverty reduction. Their round table on poverty reduction—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I'm pleased to hear that this government will be engaging in supporting communities to make a crucial contribution to the fight against child poverty in Ontario. Many of the community organizations in my riding are committed to helping give kids the best start in life, including those with special needs and those in need of protection. We know that investments made in our children today will pay dividends to lead to a better Hamilton and a better Ontario.

Could the minister please outline what investments are being made in Hamilton's children today and specifically how they will be part of a poverty reduction strategy?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I commend Hamilton for its goal of being the best place to raise a child. They get it when it comes to creating an environment where every child has the opportunity to succeed. We've been happy to support their vision.

Through our Best Start plan, we've created 1,200 new licensed child care spaces in Hamilton, and just this summer we announced \$920,000 to make child care more

affordable in Hamilton. We also know that children with special needs need help to be their very best, and that's why we've supported them every step of the way. We've doubled the number of kids in Hamilton receiving autism treatment, we've increased children's mental health funding by 25%, and we're serving over 400 more children at the Hamilton Health Sciences children's treatment centre.

We believe that by giving kids the chance to succeed, we can break the cycle of poverty. That's why we're developing a comprehensive poverty-reduction—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

TRANSFER PAYMENTS

Mr. John O'Toole: My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. This week in Montreal, Premier McGuinty confirmed that the province is likely heading towards a deficit. Ontario citizens are concerned that municipalities, schools and hospitals will not receive the funding promised by the McGuinty government. In fact, Premier McGuinty even yesterday said that those who are depending on government transfers in funding should lower their expectations—sounds like preparing to break another promise.

Last summer at AMO, they promised \$1.1 billion to municipalities. It appears now that that may be in question, or is it one-time funding? Minister, in light of all this confusion on the economy, could you reassure municipalities that you will keep your commitment to deliver on the provincial-municipal fiscal review that you have promised over the last year?

1120

Hon. Jim Watson: Thank you very much for the opportunity to once again boast about our commitment to partnering with the municipal sector, something that the honourable member and his party know little about.

They were the kings and queens of downloading when it came to taking money and programs and thrusting them onto the municipal sector. Our government has a track record of uploading, whether it's the ODP and ODSP, which when fully uploaded will save municipal property taxpayers \$935 million, or whether it's the land ambulance upload, the public health upload and the infrastructure money that the Premier announced, and those dollars will be out the door into communities within the next two to three weeks—\$1.1 billion as a result of the Investing in Ontario Act.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. John O'Toole: Well, it's all nice to announce that now that you have a deficit, you'll just keep spending. That's clear, what you've just said now.

It's clear there's a problem. You've had five years, and your track record is that you really haven't done anything. Listen to David Miller, listen to the mayor of London, listen to the mayor of Ottawa; they're all planning to have a tax increase. Your planned review of

municipal spending is overdue and long promised, but you have been, once again, unable to deliver.

Minister, would you tell the House today what to expect as municipalities are in the process of planning their municipal budgets?

Hon. Jim Watson: This is quite an interesting question. It's a "spend" and a "cut" question at the same time. I understand one of the great oxymorons of our time is "Progressive Conservative" and we're seeing that with the honourable member's question.

Let me quote someone the honourable member knows very well, Roger Anderson, who is your regional chair, talking about the Investing in Ontario Act, the \$1.1-billion investment in infrastructure. By the way, Durham region received \$53 million to help with projects in their community. I quote:

"I think it is a great step forward. Not that I'm a big fan of surpluses, but surpluses do happen and municipalities certainly can use the infrastructure funding.... People see the money at work for them and I think that's a good thing."

We're proud, the McGuinty government is proud, to invest and partner and treat with respect the municipal sector through uploading, through the AMO MOU table, through infrastructure funding—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question?

ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE DISABLED

M^{me} France Gélinas: My question is for the Premier. In the gallery today are visitors from the Canadian Hearing Society. They are here to raise awareness about issues fundamental to oral deaf, culturally deaf, deafened or hard-of-hearing communities.

Some 10% of Ontarians—that is 1.3 million Ontarians—are culturally deaf or have a hearing loss. Can the Premier outline for us how his government has addressed these Ontarians' priority accessibility issues: employment services, hearing care, and mental health and addiction?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I'm very proud of this government. In 2005, we passed unanimously the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. We are the first province to come out with this legislation, and right now we are developing standards in four areas, because we already have one that is law: customer services.

We have four tables working on developing standards in transportation, built environment, information technology and employment. At these tables, 50% represent the disabled community and 50% represent the private and public sector. It's working very well. In the supplementary, I will continue my answer.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Although this is interesting information, my question had to do specifically with the people who are culturally deaf and have hearing loss.

We are happy to welcome our friends from the Canadian Hearing Society and all of our guests in the gallery to an accessible Legislature today. However, we are concerned that this accessibility is provided on a one-off basis.

New Democrats have prepared a resolution that would ensure that the provincial Legislature is accessible each and every day that we sit. We have called for a permanent sign language interpreter for the floor of this Legislature. I would like to know, will the Premier demonstrate this government's commitment to accessibility and adopt our resolution?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Again, I'm very proud to be part of a government that is really dedicated to accessibility. Especially for those who are here in the House, we have been working very closely with them to increase the budget, which no government has done before, for interpreters and—

Interjection: Interveners.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: —interveners to help those who have challenges in understanding because they are deaf or hard-of-hearing. More than that, we have partnered with the Ministry of Education, and now, in the school system, kids will be able to learn about the profession of interpreter and intervener, because there is a lack of interpreters and interveners. That's why we are increasing the salary of these professionals and we're helping them—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: My question is to the Minister of Research and Innovation. Minister, I'm very proud of the culture of innovation that has developed throughout my riding of Mississauga—Brampton South. For example, 6N Silicon Inc. has found a new way to produce solar-grade silicon, the fundamental element needed to build solar panels.

Solar-grade silicon is projected to be worth \$10.4 billion by 2010. This will not only create jobs, but will lead to a clean, green energy solution for the world. Minister, what are you doing to ensure that companies such as 6N Silicon are able to bring their innovations to market?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank my friend for the question and originally bringing the company 6N Silicon to my personal attention, and for her advocacy of the clean tech sector.

Through the Ministry of Research and Innovation's innovation demonstration fund, we've committed \$1.5 million to help 6N test their technology for commercial applications, and now we've backed it up with an \$8-million investment through our Next Generation of Jobs Fund to support the creation of a new manufacturing plant in Vaughan. I want to thank my colleague the Minister of Economic Development for that wise investment.

This most recent investment supports 6N's \$50-million expansion, which is expected to create 84 new jobs. The expansion will help cement 6N's reputation and Ontario's reputation as a leader in the emerging green economy.

Many of the employees are former auto workers who are now transferring their wonderful skills—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: Minister, a key part of our government's five-point economic plan is to invest in innovative technologies that will create the jobs of tomorrow. 6N Silicon is a great example of how the power of innovation can turn challenges, like how to generate clean energy, into solutions that we can sell to the world.

Minister, 6N Silicon and other companies throughout the riding of Mississauga—Brampton South appreciate our government's support of innovation, but they still would like to know what additional steps our government is taking to allow Ontario companies to demonstrate the quality of their products and attract investment on the world market.

Hon. John Wilkinson: The McGuinty government has, through the Ministry of Research and Innovation, a \$30-million innovation demonstration fund—\$30 million committed to allow companies that are in the new clean tech sector to actually take their new innovations and show, by way of demonstration, a new product. We know that if our companies are able to show those products, they can then sell them around the world. 6N's innovation is about making ultra-thin silicon wafers, which are required for solar panels. Companies that have been able to do that are improving the efficiency of solar panels.

I think all of us agree that with the challenges that we face in regard to climate change, solar energy has great potential, but it is today quite expensive. What a company here in Ontario has been able to determine is a revolutionary new way of making ultra-thin silicon wafers which improve the efficiency of solar cells and reduce their cost. I am assured that there is a large—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question?

1130

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Frank Klees: To the Premier: There is one thing that we all agree on in this House, and that is that we're facing turbulent economic times. During these times, the people of Ontario want to know that their Premier is on the ground and on the job, looking after the economy of this province.

A number of months ago, the Premier created the Ministry of International Trade and Investment and appointed a minister to deal with international trade issues.

My question to the Premier is this: What is it that the Premier can do that the Minister of International Trade

and Investment cannot do on the trip that he has planned to China?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. Minister of International Trade, withdraw the comment, please.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: It was a joke. I'll withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Just say, "I withdraw the comment."

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I withdraw.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm not sure if my honourable colleague is suggesting that the Premier should never travel on behalf of Ontarians and, in this particular case, should not join four other Canadian Premiers, each of whom represents a province that is being visited by the same international economic global turbulence. I'm sure he is not suggesting that.

The fact of the matter is that the Premier—I know that my minister would acknowledge this—can sometimes get meetings with higher-level officials than can the minister. The Premier can sometimes open a few more doors for a business that is accompanying him or her than can the minister.

I think there is tremendous value in myself as well as four other Canadian Premiers travelling together to China, and in our case it's all about exploiting opportunities for businesses with environmental technologies.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: The Premier is absolutely right. I'm not suggesting that the Premier shouldn't travel on behalf of the people of Ontario. I'm also not suggesting that this trip to China is not timely. I'm suggesting that the Premier is needed here in Ontario at a time of financial crisis. I am suggesting—and I'm simply offering some advice to the Premier—that he should designate his ministers duly appointed to look after these issues, and if he wants to spend two or three days at key meetings, so be it, but make sure that he is on the ground here in Ontario, looking after the affairs of Ontario, as the Premier should, and demonstrate that kind of leadership.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm always open to advice. I get lots of advice, particularly when it comes to the best use of my time. I understand the member's intention in this, but I think it's a very good use of my time on behalf of Ontarians to go to China. There are 1.3 billion people there. It's the world's fastest-growing economy. There are tremendous economic opportunities to be found, seized and exploited there. I'm being accompanied by a sizable contingent of Ontario businesses that are eager to visit China, eager to make contacts, eager to sign contracts, all with a view to creating jobs back here in Ontario. I think that is a very good use of my time, especially at this time.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: To the Minister of Community and Social Services: This minister knows very well—we told her in the June meeting—that many grandparents do not

qualify for welfare. They live on very modest pension incomes and own very modest homes, many of which have mortgages to fund their grandchildren's needs. They have had to go into debt.

Will this minister forget defending her temporary care assistance directives, forget punishing grandparents for providing a family home for their grandchildren, recognize that a system that cuts off these grandparents is flawed, and show that she can put her heart in the right place and direct the necessary changes to ensure that all grandparents in this province raising their grandchildren qualify for temporary care assistance?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: On behalf of my colleague here and all the representatives in the House, I want to say thank you to the grandparents who believe that the well-being of their grandchildren is so important to them and they are taking care of them. That's why this government is helping through temporary care assistance. If grandparents have, for example, two of their grandchildren, they can receive up to \$1,000 a month to help them take care of their grandchildren. On top of that, they are entitled to the Ontario child benefit. They are also entitled to the national child benefit supplement. They are entitled to the assistance for children with severe disabilities. So we're helping grandparents help their grandchildren.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for question period has ended. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1135 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just like to take this opportunity to welcome a number of students who will be visiting us today from Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. They are going to be here for their media day at Queen's Park, and they've had the enjoyable job of shadowing the press gallery.

I'd also welcome all of our guests who are here and just remind all the guests who are visiting today that we certainly welcome your presence, but as much as you may wish or desire to participate in the debate, you are not allowed to participate, and no clapping, no cheering, no heckling. Thank you.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CANADIAN HEARING SOCIETY

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I would again like to welcome to the House today the Canadian Hearing Society. The society was founded in 1940 and has since become the leading provider of services, products and information that remove barriers to communication, advance hearing

health and promote equity for people who are culturally deaf, oral deaf, deafened and hard-of-hearing.

The Canadian Hearing Society's members work hard day after day to advocate on behalf of their clients to facilitate fair and equal access to all aspects of life, including employment, education, recreation, housing, health care and social services. They are able to do this by offering a wide range of services across the country that support equality and inclusion for the deaf, deafened and hard-of-hearing. These services include audiology, hearing aid fitting and dispensing, seniors' outreach, mental health and addiction counselling, language development programs for children, employment services, literacy and basic skills development, sign language interpreting and instruction, speech language pathology, speech-reading training and a wealth of communication and safety assistance devices.

The Canadian Hearing Society is poised to continue to break down barriers on behalf of their deaf, deafened and hard-of-hearing clients, and I absolutely commend them for the important work they do.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE DISABLED

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm also very happy to welcome our guests from the Canadian Hearing Society here at Queen's Park. They're certainly welcome visitors. We are especially happy to welcome Gary Malkowski, who was an NDP MPP, who has made great contributions to this House, as well as the deaf and hard-of-hearing communities.

The Canadian Hearing Society is here today to raise awareness about issues fundamental to all oral deaf, culturally deaf, deafened and hard-of-hearing communities, including matters of communication, accessibility and employment.

Ten per cent of Ontarians are culturally deaf, oral deaf or hard-of-hearing. That means 1.3 million Ontarians are affected. We are proud to support the invaluable work that happens at the Canadian Hearing Society.

In the House today, we had an ASL interpreter on the floor of the Legislature, ensuring that our democratic proceedings were accessible to hearing-impaired persons. The New Democrats want to ensure that this accessibility is a common occurrence and not an annual event.

The New Democrats have tabled a private member's resolution to ensure that our provincial Legislature is accessible each and every day. We are awaiting the McGuinty government's decision to demonstrate this government's commitment to accessibility by adopting our resolution.

STORMONT, DUNDAS AND GLENGARRY HIGHLANDERS

Mr. Jim Brownell: Recently, I was fortunate to accompany a group of constituents and friends from my riding of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, including three veterans of World War II, on a European tour of the

battlegrounds where members of the Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry highland regiment fought and died and of the cemeteries where they are laid to rest.

The Glens, as this regiment is called, is one of the oldest military regiments in Canada, and they have been proudly serving our country since the War of 1812. They are known for their bravery, their dependability and their skill in battle.

This commemorative "Following the Glens" tour encompassed 17 days through Britain, France, Belgium and the Netherlands, and recognized the sacrifices these soldiers made during the two world wars. Their names are commemorated at battle sites such as Normandy, Passchendaele and Vimy Ridge.

It was very moving to visit a place where someone had died for liberation and freedom. It was especially touching to experience this with someone who may be a family member, who may have been personally connected to these men, or is a current soldier carrying on the Glens' tradition. Perhaps these fallen Glens, so honoured on this tour, were neighbours to my parents and grandparents. They might have lived right down the street from me if things had been different and they had not gone to war. They were our brothers, fathers, grandfathers, neighbours and friends.

Also extremely moving was the gratitude shown to our fallen soldiers, and to those who fought, by the citizens of the European nations. These people experienced the courage of the Glens and other Canadian units first-hand and they understand the sacrifices made to ensure their freedom.

I really understand the phrase, "They did not die in vain." It is with gratitude that I say the battle cry, "Up the Glens."

POVERTY

Mrs. Julia Munro: Poverty concerns every member in this House, but the solution is not to increase the minimum wage. In uncertain economic times, raising the minimum wage will cut jobs and impose greater costs on already beleaguered employers. It is time for the government to start thinking smart and taking the actions necessary to reduce poverty in Ontario.

Dr. Roger Martin has identified six specific groups at high risk of poverty. These six groups are high school dropouts, recent immigrants, lone parents, the disabled, unattached individuals between 45 and 64 and aboriginals.

Jim Flaherty recognized the need to target specific groups in the last federal budget. The federal budget will invest more than \$550 million a year to establish a working income tax benefit. They will spend \$140 million over the next two years to establish a registered disabilities savings plan, similar to an RESP.

It is time for the McGuinty government to follow the lead of the federal Conservatives and start targeting specific programs to reduce poverty. Many of the initiatives

necessary can only be carried out by provincial action. We are waiting for you to start.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): It's a real pleasure to see so many members here in the House for the members' statements. I would just ask that they listen to the statements, and if they want to engage in a conversation, that's what the galleries on the east and west are for.

1510

ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE DISABLED

Mr. Frank Klees: On that point of order, Mr. Speaker: We have visiting with us today people from the Canadian Hearing Society. In my meeting earlier today with representatives from the society, a point was made to me that it's ironic that this House passed unanimously the accessibility act but that so little attention is given in this place to accessibility. What was stated very clearly to me was that for individuals who are hard-of-hearing, what is happening in this House is that it's very, very inconsiderate of them to be heckling while they are here, because it's virtually impossible for them to understand.

My point and appeal is this: that perhaps at least for today, out of consideration for our visitors, we would heed their respect.

Hon. Michael Bryant: The member, I think, is speaking to decorum as much as anything else. I appreciate his acknowledgment of the passage by this government of the disability act, and I do look forward to decorum following and during the economic statement.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thank the government House leader and the member from Newmarket-Aurora. That was not a point of order, but I do very much appreciate the comments that were made, because I think it is something we all need to be conscious of day in and day out—the importance of maintaining decorum in this chamber and having respect for one another. I would ask each member to heed the words of the honourable member, and the words that this Speaker and previous Speakers have presented to this chamber over the years, on the importance of maintaining decorum.

M^{me} France Gélinas: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: This is the exact reason that the NDP has introduced a motion today, so that we will have sign language interpreters in this House on a daily basis, and that we behave in a way so as to make the House more accessible to the hard-of-hearing and the culturally deaf.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, and I recognize that that motion has been placed on the order paper and I would encourage the discussion to take place amongst the House leaders to see if it can be moved forward for discussion by all members of the House.

GREG KAZMIERSKI AND ELLEN GOODMAN

Mr. Phil McNeely: Ottawa residents are very proud to have two of their own recognized by the government of Ontario. This past week, Greg Kazmierski and Ellen Goodman were awarded the Ontario Medal for Good Citizenship by the Lieutenant Governor, the Honourable David Onley.

Greg is a very busy community activist in Orléans and someone I am very proud to call a friend. A member of the local baseball team, the dart league and the Knights of Columbus, he is also an altar server at the Notre-Dame Cathedral Basilica and a very prominent figure during the Blackburn hamlet community fun fair.

In 1990, Greg became the first person with Down's syndrome to graduate from Lester B. Pearson high school in my riding. Three years later, he was honoured with a Canada 125 award for his numerous contributions to the community. You can't find a door in Blackburn hamlet that doesn't know Greg on a first-name basis.

He has had more challenges than many of us here could imagine struggling with, and he has created positive change and tolerance in the face of discrimination and prejudice.

The second person, Ellen Goodman, is an exceptional teacher committed to helping children achieve their personal best. For 28 years, Ms. Goodman worked as a teacher for children with visual impairment, developmental and physical disabilities. She was also a leading force behind Ontario's new blind-low vision early intervention program launched in 2007.

Now retired from the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, she continues to be a respected and tremendous advocate, both locally and provincially, for children with disabilities and their families.

To Greg and Ellen on behalf of myself and my colleague the honourable member for Ottawa-Vanier, I say well done. We can hardly wait to see what you both do next. Keep up the great work.

TRANSFER PAYMENTS

Mr. John O'Toole: Today, we have an economic update by the Minister of Finance, and next week, I think, the Premier leaves for two weeks in China.

The question then becomes, how could a Premier a month ago tell municipal leaders, "Here's a billion dollars from a surplus fund," as he announced at the AMO conference? Did the Premier not foresee that a month later we would have the economic conditions we have today? Even the Minister of Finance, when asked a month ago, said that we have contingencies like the \$800-million fund and the surplus.

Today, we already know, thanks to the Premier's pre-announcement, that we have spent the \$800-million contingency, we've spent the billion-dollar surplus, and now we're short another billion dollars.

Did the Premier not know that he had made a promise? He made a promise to the municipalities to sort

things out—to the poverty groups of Ontario, to the elementary teachers, to the hospitals, to the long-term care community, a list of promises.

As the leader of Ontario, you would have to wonder that if he did not know, why did he make the promises? And if he did know, then he shouldn't have made the promises.

I can tell you today that I'm waiting for these statements to be more excuses from the McGuinty government of why they didn't do what they said they would do.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I rise in the House today to speak about the McGuinty government's commitment to improving the access and quality of health care received by Ontarians.

On Saturday, October 18, the members of the Ontario Medical Association ratified a new four-year agreement with the McGuinty government. Part of that new agreement includes a new program to help 500,000 Ontarians without a family physician to find one.

The program, called health care connect, will connect patients with health care providers who are taking on new patients. To be launched in February 2009, the program will have teams of health care professionals in each of the 14 LHINs to assist in connecting people with the appropriate health care providers in their local communities.

Other key aspects of the agreement include reducing congestion in hospital emergency rooms; providing funding for 500 nurses to join group practices; helping patients who have chronic diseases such as diabetes to better manage their condition and reduce their need for emergency health service; ensuring Ontario remains the jurisdiction of choice for future physicians with a new program that will defer interest on medical resident debt; and improving access to community mental health services provided by physicians.

This agreement reflects the vision shared between the McGuinty government—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Members' statements.

CITY OF TORONTO

Mr. Mike Colle: I rise in the House today to remind all Ontarians that the city of Toronto is a wonderful place to live, work and raise a family. One rarely takes the time to celebrate the diversity, culture and sense of community that the hard-working citizens of Toronto live every day. In fact, Toronto is home to people from every part of Ontario and every part of the world. This diversity and sense of community is celebrated in unique neighbourhoods from the Humber to the Don, from the Lakeshore to the Rouge.

The size and scope of such a large city also present unique challenges. Our government has responded to

these challenges with great investments in our city. They include: Move Ontario 2020, which invests \$17.5 billion in infrastructure to build our subway and our transit lines across the GTA; another investment of \$870 million to build a subway to York University; and \$161 million in provincial gas tax funds to go to the city. Toronto also just received an additional \$238 million to invest in retrofitting our public housing.

These investments are a symbol of the Ontario government's commitment to the cities and towns around the province, and will ensure that Toronto can continue to welcome people from all over the world, and be a city where people work, where they respect their neighbours and where they can help other parts of this province by being prosperous here in Toronto. Hats off to Toronto.

CANADIAN HEARING SOCIETY

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Today is the Canadian Hearing Society's day at Queen's Park. I have the honour of speaking to the work that the Canadian Hearing Society undertakes on behalf of the deaf, deafened or hard-of-hearing.

Founded in 1940, the Canadian Hearing Society is the leading provider of services, products and information that remove barriers to communication, advance hearing health, and promote equity for people who are culturally deaf, oral deaf, deafened and hard-of-hearing in Ontario.

Unique in North America, the Canadian Hearing Society offers an integrated roster of essential services, including a number of health and social services, through 26 offices in Ontario.

This day is important for all of us as it is a day to break down barriers to communication and accessibility and enable employment opportunities for those who suffer from hearing disorders.

Canadian families from coast to coast have been affected by hearing losses, and my family has been no exception. I know first-hand the difficulties that individuals and families face because of hearing loss. Without the work of many organizations like the Canadian Hearing Society, families and individuals would have a much more difficult time in overcoming the communication barriers that are faced by the hearing-impaired.

Through its support programs, the society serves working-aged individuals, families, children and seniors, assisting them with housing, employment, life skills, citizenship and counselling as needed. These programs play an essential role in supporting deaf, deafened and hard-of-hearing Ontarians, enabling them to lead a full and enriched life, for the benefit of all Ontarians.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome a former member, the member from Windsor-Walkerville in the 34th Parliament, in the

east members' gallery, Michael Ray. Welcome back to Queen's Park.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

BUDGET MEASURES AND INTERIM APPROPRIATION ACT, 2008 (NO. 2)

LOI DE 2008 SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES ET L'AFFECTATION ANTICIPÉE DE CRÉDITS (NO 2)

Mr. Duncan moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 114, An Act respecting Budget measures, interim appropriations and other matters, to amend the Ottawa Congress Centre Act and to enact the Ontario Capital Growth Corporation Act, 2008 / *Projet de loi 114, Loi concernant les mesures budgétaires, l'affectation anticipée de crédits et d'autres questions, modifiant la Loi sur le Centre des congrès d'Ottawa et édictant la Loi de 2008 sur la Société ontarienne de financement de la croissance.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The minister for a short statement.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: During ministerial statements.
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STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

ECONOMIC OUTLOOK AND FISCAL REVIEW PERSPECTIVES ÉCONOMIQUES ET REVUE FINANCIÈRE

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I rise today to present the 2008 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review.

Je suis heureux de présenter aujourd'hui le document *Perspectives économiques et revue financière de l'Ontario 2008.*

I do so at a time when we are experiencing a global economic crisis that was not imagined even a few short weeks ago. The liquidity crisis in financial markets has undermined business and consumer confidence around the world. This in turn is spilling over into the real economy. The impacts of this are real, present, and directly affect individuals, families, businesses and governments. Ontario families are worried. Ontario busi-

nesses are already feeling it. Ontarians are understandably anxious and concerned for their future.

That's why the McGuinty government has a plan to address these concerns.

Let me say at the outset that we are equipped, we are prepared and we are determined to get through these challenging economic times. Today I will update you on our plan to help get Ontario through the times. In addition, I will detail the steps, some of which have already been taken, that will help manage the province's finances through the remainder of this fiscal year. The principles that have guided our economic policies to date remain the right ones to help us navigate through the current economic storm.

Economists have been forced by unprecedented economic volatility to dramatically alter their growth projections for the United States, for Canada, for Ontario and for the world.

Throughout our mandate, the government's economic policies have been guided by three principles:

First, through our five-point economic plan, we will continue to build confidence in Ontario's economy.

Second, we have been prudent and cautious but have moved quickly to respond to changing economic circumstances.

Third, we have always taken a balanced, comprehensive approach to expenditure and tax policy. We have worked hard to protect the services that Ontarians value while enhancing Ontario's global competitiveness.

These principles will continue to inform our decisions. Above all else, we will be guided by sound judgment and informed by the best possible advice.

Here in Canada, around the world and in Ontario, it is not business as usual; ici-même au Canada, dans le monde et en Ontario, le cours normal des affaires n'a plus cours. It cannot be, given the speed and scale of global economic events.

Based on the best available advice, we project economic growth of 0.1% for this fiscal year, compared to the 1.1% forecast in the 2008 budget. The average private sector forecast is 0.7% growth for next year. Based on these figures, we expect Ontario's revenues to decline this year. Therefore, we must make a number of changes as we adjust to these new and unforeseen challenges.

As a result, our government is projecting a deficit of \$500 million for the fiscal year 2008-09. En conséquence, le gouvernement prévoit un déficit de 500 \$ millions pour l'exercice 2008-2009.

Underneath all of these statistics and underneath all of the uncertainty, there are real people with real fears, real concerns and real needs, and in these uncertain times, Ontario families count more than ever on the vital services that their government provides, and we will continue to provide them.

These investments in health and education have an important stimulative impact on the provincial economy. Many of our important public services and stimulative investments are delivered through our transfer partners,

so we will need their help to protect the quality of public services while continuing to invest in economic growth.

Eighty percent of government spending in 2008-09 flows directly to transfer payment recipients. Growth in transfer funding is related to growth in the economy. Therefore, growth in funding to transfer payment recipients will not be increasing in 2009-10 according to what was projected in the last budget. We are confident that our transfer partners will work together with us to rise to the challenge of the current fiscal situation.

As we manage our finances in a prudent and responsible fashion, the government will delay the implementation of, and slow down, some new spending. At the same time, we will restrain internal government expenditures.

Ensemble, ces mesures de restriction permettront de réaliser des économies de plus de 100 \$ millions dans les cinq derniers mois de l'exercice 2008-2009.

Together, these restraint measures will result in more than \$100 million in savings in the five months remaining in the 2008-09 fiscal year.

We will continue to implement our agenda, and we will continue to do so in a responsible and prudent manner, given the challenges of our times. We will continue to hire more nurses, only not as quickly as we would have liked. We will move forward with repairing schools and establishing more family health teams, only we will do so more slowly. But make no mistake: We will continue to move Ontario forward.

It has been said that the best time to fix the roof is while the sun is shining, and we have done that and more. Over the past five years, we have placed Ontario's economy on a new, stronger foundation. Ontario is in far better shape to respond to today's challenges than it would otherwise have been.

Our economy continues to show strength in key areas. During the past five years, Ontario has created more than half a million net new jobs, unemployment is lower than when we took office, the labour force has grown, and real income has risen. We have made these gains in the face of a strong dollar, the high cost of oil and a slowing US economy.

At the same time, like many other places in the world, we have experienced job losses in manufacturing and forestry over several years. It has been estimated that about 200,000 manufacturing and forestry jobs have been lost since 2002, and our government's five-point plan is responding to that. These challenges, past and present, impact directly on Ontario individuals, families and businesses.

That is why we developed the five-point plan, and that's why we will continue to work to grow our economy.

We knew that to compete against the rest of the world and win, we needed a sound economic plan. Our five-point plan invests in skills, infrastructure and innovation, while lowering business costs and building partnerships.

Our investments in skills and knowledge, including Reaching Higher, has resulted in 100,000 more Ontarians

being trained in colleges and universities. Our skills training initiatives mean that more than 50,000 more Ontarians are learning a skilled trade. Our \$2-billion skills-to-jobs action plan helps to retrain laid-off workers for jobs in the new economy.

Investments in infrastructure are a major part of our five-point economic plan to stimulate the economy, and they will continue.

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Three years ago, we launched ReNew Ontario, a five-year, \$30-billion infrastructure investment that is building new roads, new schools, new hospitals, new bridges and transit right across Ontario today, as we speak. Today, more than 100 major construction projects have been initiated, and our investments are creating more than 100,000 jobs.

We have also supported innovation and proposed a tax incentive to commercialize Canadian ideas, so that home-grown ideas turn into hometown jobs. Our government is well aware of the impact that taxes have on Ontario businesses, and we know that lowering business costs helps them succeed and create more jobs. Since 2004, we've cut business taxes by more than \$1.5 billion. Fully phased in, our targeted tax cuts will save businesses \$3 billion annually.

For several years now, we've been partnering with the key sectors of the Ontario economy and other jurisdictions to encourage economic growth. That's why, three years ago, we implemented our advanced manufacturing investment strategy. So far, 18 projects have generated \$880 million in investment and created or maintained 4,000 jobs.

This is significant progress, but there's more to do. We're going to keep working hard so that Ontario workers and their families have what they need to find opportunity. For Ontario, finding that opportunity means looking for new trading partners beyond the United States. That's why we've opened up seven new international trade offices and have a minister dedicated to enhancing international trade and investment.

We have moved aggressively to obtain fairness for Ontarians in Canada. If we were treated fairly by Ottawa, we could keep more of our taxpayer dollars in Ontario. We could move further and we could move faster with our five-point plan. In particular, we could better support Ontarians who are losing their jobs, and we could build more infrastructure and create still more jobs. Finally, we could provide more assistance to help businesses create those jobs. As proud Canadians, Ontarians want to build a stronger Ontario for a stronger Canada, and fairness will give us the tools to get the job done.

We will continue to build business and consumer confidence regardless of the turbulence in today's economy. Building confidence means that we have to take a comprehensive view of all the levers available to us; a single-minded agenda that calls exclusively for tax cuts and deregulation has not worked anywhere. We also reject the notion that we can spend our way out of difficult times. Building confidence means moving

forward with a plan, but at the same time, being prepared to make tough decisions. Building confidence means working with our partners to help them respond to today's pressing needs. Building confidence means taking a balanced approach. Building confidence means responding to real problems in an open-minded and transparent fashion and working with all Ontarians. Above all, building confidence means doing our part: making difficult and responsible decisions to help families and businesses succeed.

Ontario possesses enduring strengths. We possess a shared commitment to look after one another and a sound plan to grow stronger. Today's economic reality is forcing governments around the world to re-examine their expenditures, adjust their assumptions and respond to an environment where the only constant is uncertainty. The McGuinty government's five-point economic plan has been, and continues to be, the right plan for the times. The investments we have made over the past five years will help Ontario weather today's economic storm and better prepare us for the new economy of the 21st century.

Today, we are called upon to rise to these unprecedented challenges in the global economy, these challenges which are real, present and being felt by our families and businesses. That's why I urge the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs to begin its pre-budget consultations earlier this year than they did last year.

Moving forward, the McGuinty government will continue its prudent and responsible approach to the management of Ontario's finances. This year's projected deficit will allow us to maintain our important investments in Ontario's economic future as we work through the real challenges that confront the world today. Having eliminated the previous government's \$5.5-billion deficit and having delivered three consecutive surplus budgets, we don't take this decision lightly. We recognize the importance of a strong balance sheet in the formation of future prosperity. In taking this approach, we also acknowledge the importance of infrastructure investments, which create jobs now and improve competitiveness tomorrow.

We also appreciate the value of training opportunities for men and women who, through no fault of their own, have lost their jobs. We also see very clearly the potential economic growth associated with research and innovation, and understand the positive impact of targeted tax cuts.

Having said this, we will bring even greater focus to the management of our expenses, and we are compelled to temporarily delay and slow down some new spending. As Premier McGuinty has said, "While we can't do everything, we will do everything we can."

Though the confidence of Ontarians has been shaken by recent world events, we can be certain that we will all get through this.

Nous serons à la hauteur des défis qui se présentent à nous. We will rise to the challenges before us, we will

find new ways to grow, and we will grow stronger together.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

ECONOMIC OUTLOOK AND FISCAL REVIEW

Mr. Tim Hudak: Absolutely incredible—the Ontario Liberals get a standing ovation for a return to deficit spending in the province of Ontario. Today, Ontario, along with PEI, stands as the only province in Confederation to be back in deficit. Shame on you for running a deficit again in the province of Ontario.

Surely the minister must have been embarrassed to have made such an incredible admission. Just eight months ago in this very place, he had a \$5.6-billion surplus and bragged about an \$800-million reserve fund. Just four weeks ago, he stood in this very place and said that everything was under control and that the budget would still be balanced. Today, he had to admit that this was all nonsense. He had to admit that Dalton McGuinty's plan is not working. What he has not done is explained how they managed to go from \$6.4 billion in the black to \$500 million in the red, nor will he take any responsibility for the bad decisions that got us here.

Dalton McGuinty says the first role of government is to do no harm. By failing in his responsibility to manage the public finances and the economy, he has done harm to every family and business in the province of Ontario. By avoiding the difficult but necessary decisions to balance the books, Dalton McGuinty is laying a heavier burden on our children and our grandchildren, and limiting economic opportunities for Ontario families today.

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With this deficit today, Dalton McGuinty has added on some \$31 billion in new provincial debt. That translates to, for every household in the province, another \$6,500 that they owe, plus interest. Working families know what that means. That means higher taxes for already strapped middle-class families and seniors to pay down that debt. It also means higher interest payments instead of investments in front-line services like health care or education. It is unnecessary, irresponsible and harmful to run a deficit in the province of Ontario today.

Let's put this into perspective. Since forming government, the McGuinty Liberals have raked in some \$28 billion in increased revenues, chiefly from higher taxes and increased transfers from the federal government: \$28 billion is greater than the entire budgets of Manitoba and Saskatchewan combined, yet the Premier still comes here today and says he is going to run a deficit in the province of Ontario.

While working families struggle with the decision to fill their grocery cart or pay their electricity bill, this government has proved today that they are unwilling to make the tough decisions and that they are willing to mortgage our province's future after the biggest tax hike in Ontario's history, because they lack the courage to set

priorities and make the tough decisions to put this province back on track.

Worst of all, Ontario has been in a manufacturing recession for years. Working families in my riding in Niagara and Hamilton, sadly, know this all too well. But Dalton McGuinty seems oblivious to the reality experienced by Ontario families and has no plan whatsoever to create well-paying jobs in this province.

There's nothing in this economic update to indicate that Dalton McGuinty understands what Ontario families and seniors are going through, nor any indication that he's willing to give them any kind of relief.

John Tory and the Ontario PC caucus—

Interjections.

Mr. Tim Hudak: —will continue to call on the Premier to set priorities, to stop trying to be all things to all people; to open the books all the way and account for how every precious tax dollar is spent; to implement public spending restraint; and to create a private sector job creation plan involving tax and regulatory relief. Do not add a penny more onto Ontario's massive debt load. Do what every Ontario family and small business does each and every day, and live within your means.

All we saw today from Dalton McGuinty was more of the same: the same old and failed high-tax, high-spending, no-jobs policy that is causing Ontario to fall further and further behind. We saw the same old blame game of refusing to set priorities, make decisions or take any responsibility.

The tax-and-spend policies that got us into the mess are certainly not going to get us out of it. It's time that Dalton McGuinty finally admitted that he is failing the test of leadership, and it's time for this Liberal government to change its course.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask all members—for the most part, as the finance minister was delivering his statement, there was not a great deal of banter across the floor; there was some—to just give the opportunity to the members to respond.

ECONOMIC OUTLOOK AND FISCAL REVIEW

Mr. Howard Hampton: I hope that people at home have a chance to watch some of this, because what's unfolding in Ontario over the last three years is the loss of an incredible number of good jobs: 240,000 good jobs that would support families and support communities.

What's also unfolding, at a time when the McGuinty government was boasting about surpluses, is that more Ontarians have fallen into poverty. We know that the world is facing difficult economic times. I don't think people across Ontario need to be told that over and over again. I think people can read the news and figure out what is happening here. I think what people were hoping for today was to see a meaningful response from the McGuinty government. There were a lot more words—and the McGuinty government seems to be very capable

of putting out a lot more words—but when you look at this, there is nothing new here.

What's the McGuinty government's response to the increasing loss of jobs? The same old five-point plan that they announced a couple of years ago, and since they announced it, thousands more good jobs have disappeared; nothing more. While other provinces are implementing buy-domestic policies, while other provinces are implementing a refundable manufacturing investment tax credit to keep manufacturing jobs in place, while other provinces are implementing reasonable industrial hydro rates to keep manufacturing jobs in place, what did the McGuinty government do today? Nothing; absolutely nothing. At a time when private forecasters are forecasting that Ontario will lose another quarter-million good manufacturing jobs, what is the response of the McGuinty government? Nothing.

What is equally frustrating about this is that many of the things that are part of this so-called five-point plan are already failures. Two hundred and forty thousand workers, hard-working people, in this province have lost their jobs. The government's response? Their so-called Second Career strategy. Only 1,000 workers have signed up for Second Career, despite the fact that 240,000 lost their jobs. To any reasonable person, there is a message there: This Second Career strategy isn't working. What's the response of the government? More of the same old, same old.

The OECD told us earlier this week that more people are falling into poverty in the province of Ontario. What is the response of the McGuinty government today? In this economic statement, they don't even mention the word "poverty." It is as if the 1.8 million people in Ontario who are living in poverty don't even exist for the McGuinty government, except every once in a while to make another promise.

The dental program, which would not only help people who were losing their teeth and suffering general overall ill health as a result—not a penny. The fact of the matter is, someone living on Ontario Works today is over \$6,000 below the poverty line. Anything about that? Nothing. The government boasts about its Ontario child benefit, but nothing meaningful is going to happen from that until 2012. Meanwhile, more kids in Ontario are falling into poverty.

What is so clear about this is that the McGuinty government, that really did not have a plan to sustain jobs and help the poor during good times, now in bad times doesn't have a plan either; no plan for poverty—you can't mention the word—and no plan to sustain jobs.

People in tough times need leadership from the government. This is when people who are facing tough times need to see bold action from the government. What is the bold action from the McGuinty government? Same old, same old. Policies that led to the loss of 240,000 manufacturing jobs are going to continue in place; policies which led to an increase in poverty in Ontario are going to continue in place.

I think that most Ontarians, when they hear about this today, are going to be terribly let down. A government that announces and reannounces that it's an activist government, that it cares about the less fortunate, that it cares about people struggling in poverty, comes up and says, "Gee, folks, times are tough, and you're on your own." That's the message here today, and it's shameful.

PETITIONS

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: There is no help for the people of Oakville and Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital today.

"To the Legislative Assembly:

"Whereas the current Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital is fully utilized; and

"Whereas Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital was sized to serve a town of Oakville population of 130,000" people, "and the current population is now ... over 170,000" people; "and

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"Whereas the population of Oakville continues to grow as mandated by 'Places to Grow,' an act of the Ontario Legislature, and is projected to be 187,000 people in 2012, the completion date for a new facility in the original time frame; and

"Whereas residents of the town of Oakville are entitled to the same quality of health care as all Ontarians; and

"Whereas hospital facilities in the surrounding area do not have capacity to absorb Oakville's overflow needs;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure take the necessary steps to ensure the new Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital be completed under its original timelines without further delay."

I'm pleased to sign this petition and pass it to my page, Jenna.

TUITION

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I have thousands of petitions presented to me this morning by the Canadian Federation of Students, and this is but a fraction of what I was given by them. There were approximately 670,000 names.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Can you please read the petition?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas undergraduate tuition fees in Ontario have increased by 195% since 1990 and are the third-highest in all of the provinces in Canada; and

"Whereas average student debt in Ontario has skyrocketed by 250% in the last 15 years to over \$25,000 for four years of study; and

"Whereas international students pay three to four times more for the same education, and domestic students in professional programs such as law or medicine pay as much tuition as \$20,000 per year; and

"Whereas 70% of new jobs require post-secondary education, and fees reduce the opportunity for many low- and middle-income families while magnifying barriers for aboriginal, rural, racialized and other marginalized students; and

"Whereas Ontario currently provides the lowest per capita funding for post-secondary education in Canada, while many countries fully fund higher education and charge little or no fees for college and university; and

"Whereas public opinion polls show that nearly three quarters of Ontarians think the government's Reaching Higher framework for tuition fee increases of 20% to 36% over four years is unfair;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, support the Canadian Federation of Students' call to immediately drop tuition fees to 2004 levels and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to introduce a framework that:

"(1) Reduces tuition and ancillary fees annually for all students.

"(2) Converts a portion of every student loan into a grant.

"(3) Increases per-student funding above the national average."

I support this petition and I will be signing it.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Kim Craiton: I'm pleased to introduce this petition, a grandparents' petition, and it reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents, as requested in Bill 33, put forward by the member from Niagara Falls.

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact

between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

I'm pleased to sign my name in support of this petition.

SEXUAL REASSIGNMENT SURGERY

Mr. Jim Wilson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the previous Progressive Conservative government determined sex change operations were not a medical spending priority and instead chose to invest in essential health care services; and

"Whereas Premier McGuinty said in 2004 that funding for sex change operations was not a priority of his government; and

"Whereas the current Liberal government has eliminated and reduced OHIP coverage for chiropractic, optometry and physiotherapy services; and

"Whereas the present shortage of doctors and nurses, troubling waiting times for emergency services and other treatment, operational challenges at many hospitals, as well as a crisis in our long-term-care homes signify the current government has not met their health care commitments;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario does not fund sex change operations under OHIP and instead concentrates its priorities on essential health services and directs our health care resources to improve patient care for Ontarians."

I agree with this petition and I've signed it.

PROTECTION FOR MINERS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition here from the people of Ottawa.

"Whereas the current legislation contained in the Ontario health and safety act and regulations for mines and mining plants does not adequately protect the lives of miners, we request revisions to the act;

"Lyle Everett Defoe and the scoop tram he was operating fell 150 feet down an open stope (July 23, 2007). Lyle was 25 years and 15 days old when he was killed at Xstrata Kidd Creek mine site, Timmins.

"Section R-60 (page 60 of Mining Regulations), paragraph 74 states that, 'A shaft, raise or other opening in an underground mine shall be securely fenced, covered or otherwise guarded. RRO 1990, Reg. 854s 75(1).' The stope where Lyle was killed was protected by a length of orange plastic snow fence and a rope with a warning sign. These barriers would not have been visible if the bucket of the scoop tram was raised. Lyle's body was recovered from behind the scoop tram.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Concrete berms must be mandatory to protect all open stopes and raises;

"All miners and contractors working underground must have working communication devices and personal locators;

"All equipment involved in injuries and fatalities must be recovered and examined unless such recovery would endanger the lives of others; and

"The entire act must be reviewed and amended to better protect underground workers."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the Clerk with page Andrew.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition from a number of constituents in my riding.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents;

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act as above to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

As I agree with this petition, I shall sign it and send it to the clerks' table.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. John O'Toole: On this day of the financial statement, I have an important petition from my constituents in the riding of Durham, which reads as follows:

"Whereas high gasoline prices are now unaffordable for the average person; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government's tax on a litre of gasoline is 14.7 cents; and

"Whereas the federal government's tax on a litre of gasoline is 10 cents plus the GST;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, hereby petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

"(1) That the McGuinty government immediately freeze gas prices for a temporary period until world prices moderate.

"(2) That the McGuinty government and the federal government immediately lower or eliminate their tax on gas for a temporary period until world oil prices moderate.

"(3) That the McGuinty government immediately initiate a royal commission" or a select committee "to investigate the predatory gas prices charged by oil companies operating in Ontario."

I'm pleased to present this to one of the new pages, Elise.

1600

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL POLICIES

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: This petition speaks to fairness for people of Ontario. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the federal government gives more support for economic development, health care and infrastructure to other parts of Canada, and unemployed workers in Ontario get less employment insurance support than in other parts of Canada;

"Whereas the federal system of taxes and equalization extracts over \$20 billion from the people of Ontario every year above and beyond what Ottawa invests in Ontario;

"Whereas laid-off workers in Ontario get \$4,630 less in employment insurance than they would get if they lived in another part of Canada;

"Whereas federal health care money is supposed to be divided equally among all Canadians, but right now Ontario residents are shortchanged by \$773 million per year;

"Whereas the federal government provides economic development support for people living in the north, Atlantic Canada, Quebec and the west, but provides no economic development support for southern Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to demand that the federal government stop gouging the people of Ontario and treat them fairly."

Since I agree, I'm delighted to sign my name to it.

DRINKING AND DRIVING

Mr. Frank Klees: "Petition to the Parliament of Ontario:

"Whereas Tyler Mulcahy and his friends lost their lives in a tragic accident that could have been avoided; and

"Whereas young people must learn zero tolerance for drinking and driving to protect themselves from enduring tragedy that will severely impact them, their families and their friends; and

"Whereas, towards this end, young people need to acquire safe and responsible driving habits from as early an age as possible; and

"Whereas improved provincial driving laws can effectively contribute to the process of enhanced driver training and responsible habits among youth in this respect;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to call on the Ontario Ministry of Transportation to enact laws to revoke the licence of drivers 21 years of age and younger with alcohol in their bloodstream, and to also revoke their licence for speeding, for a period of from three months to one year, based upon the determined amount of alcohol or the level of speed involved."

I'm pleased to affix my signature as a sign of support for this petition.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition here from the patients of Dr. Uzma Ahmed, who practises on Meadowvale Town Centre Circle in north Mississauga. It reads as follows:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I am pleased to sign and support this petition and to ask page Kevin to carry it for me.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

APOLOGY ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR
LA PRÉSENTATION D'EXCUSES

Mr. Bentley moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 108, An Act respecting apologies / Projet de loi 108, Loi concernant la présentation d'excuses.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: At the outset, I'll be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, David Zimmer, the MPP for Willowdale, and the MPP for Sault Ste. Marie, David Orazietti.

I just want to take a few minutes at the very outset of this proceeding to speak to the fundamental purpose of this piece of legislation. If passed, what we will have in legislation is something that will reflect our natural human emotion and tendency. When we have caused some harm to another—or even think we might have caused some harm to another—it is natural for us to say, "I'm sorry," maybe to give an explanation accompanying the bare words "I'm sorry." It helps to restore relations with the individual we might have harmed; it helps the acknowledgement on the part of the person who might have been harmed; it helps the healing and reconciliation process. But oh, no, the law has got in the way of that natural human emotion, and over time the law has said to individuals, to organizations: "No, you cannot apologize, because if you do, that apology can be used in civil legal proceedings that might be brought against you. You cannot apologize, because if you do, any policy of insurance that might cover you will be null and void." The laws got in the way of a good human reaction. This legislation is being brought to address that.

I want to say to all members of the House that this is not an idea that originated with me or my ministry. In fact, the members of this House have heard about this very good proposal before, because my colleague David Orazietti, the MPP for Sault Ste. Marie, introduced it as a private member's bill. We are here today to speak to this because of his good work, his good research, his very convincing arguments, and I am delighted that it has now become part of the government-proposed legislation.

This will protect apologies that are made. They can still be used in criminal prosecutions, they'll still be able to be used in Provincial Offences Act prosecutions, but it will protect those apologies that are made by individuals and organizations. They won't be able to be used in future civil legal proceedings, and any contract of insurance will still be of full force and effect if individuals do what they want to do and acknowledge any responsibility they either have or believe they have.

I have outlined, in very sparse detail, what my colleagues are going to speak to in greater detail and that I hope will find the approval of all members of the House.

Thank you very much for this opportunity, and I know I'm sharing my time with my colleague David Zimmer.

Mr. David Orazietti: It's a pleasure to be here today to speak to this bill, and I want to thank very much our Attorney General and the Premier for their support—and, in fact, all of my colleagues and members of the House who have already made comments on this potential legislation, if passed, and have thrown, I think, their overwhelming support behind this. I am looking forward to hearing what the opposition benches are going to say on this particular bill. We have heard some of the comments to date, and I think, so far, they have been supportive.

I want to talk just briefly about where the proposal really came from, and I think I will be reflecting, perhaps, what many of the members in this House have experienced in their own constituency offices with individuals who have come to them with various circumstances. I will use some health care examples to be relevant, because I think this has, obviously, a larger relevance and significance in the health care field. We've all had individuals come to our office and express to us their concerns around various medical procedures and health procedures. In my conversations with a former senior person at our local Sault Area Hospital, Brady Irwin, we talked about the process for remedying and dealing with an individual who may have been adversely affected by something that has taken place in the health care system. We began talking about the apology framework and the apology premise and how this plays such an important role in our health care system, both for closure and to allow people to move on, as well as to ensure that the lines of communication remain open so that the individual can continue to receive all of the necessary information and access the appropriate health care remedies as are suited for their particular circumstance.

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To put that in context, the research began some time ago, but I should say that there are other jurisdictions in Canada and in the United States that have moved forward with various types of apology legislation. Some are comprehensive—in other words, they cover all areas beyond health care—and some are particular to the health care sector and health care field.

On May 18, 2006, British Columbia became the first province in the country to pass apology legislation, and it was a comprehensive piece of legislation. Saskatchewan introduced an amendment to their Evidence Act on May 17, 2007, so about a year later it was passed in Saskatchewan. Manitoba followed the BC model more closely, introducing a more comprehensive apology bill that was passed in the fall of 2007. So here we are, as the fourth jurisdiction in Canada looking at this proposed legislation, and I'm very hopeful that it passes.

In the United States, Massachusetts was the first state to have comprehensive apology legislation, and they actually passed that in 1986. The more recent experiences in the US are in areas limited to health care—and there are far more states that have a health care apology type of

exemption—and there are about 35 US states that have some form of apology legislation, either specific to health care or in a comprehensive framework.

So I think there is ample evidence to support moving forward with this. This has been tried in other jurisdictions; it has been supported.

I'm going to talk a little bit about the individuals here in our province who have supported it, because I need to recognize and thank some of the individuals who came forward to do so.

First, I want to recognize Phil Hassen. Some of you may know his name, as he was a former Deputy Minister of Health in the province of Ontario. He's now the CEO of the Canadian Patient Safety Institute. He came here from Alberta, as his office is in Edmonton, to support this when we introduced it. He made the following remarks: "An Apology Act is an important step forward for the people of Ontario and it is consistent with our recently released Canadian Disclosure Guidelines, which aim to increase honest and open communication among health care professionals, patients and the public. The proposed Apology Act and the guidelines are proof of a cultural shift underway in society recognizing that offering a sincere apology or expression of regret is simply the right thing to do in often very difficult and emotional circumstances. It is a sign of caring, compassion and empathy—not blame or guilt."

Dr. Janice Willett, who was the president of the Ontario Medical Association and who actually practises medicine in my riding of Sault Ste. Marie—we're very fortunate to have her in our community; she's a fantastic physician—made the following comment at the same event: "Ontario doctors support apology legislation because it will enable health care professionals to focus on patient needs during difficult times. This will put Ontario in line with other provinces and enhance the ability of doctors and nurses to communicate with their patients."

Doris Grinspun, who, as you know, is the executive director of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, also indicated her support and was very interested in seeing this legislation move forward and encouraged all parties to support the legislation.

Tom Closson, who is the president and CEO of the Ontario Hospital Association, welcomes the apology legislation as the next critical step in further opening up disclosure initiatives and improving patient safety in the province. We have the RAO, Preston Zuliani from the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and Greg Goulin, who is the president of the Ontario Bar Association. I'm very pleased to see the legal community embracing this particular legislation. The Ontario Bar Association has said that they support the legislation and they have advised the Attorney General of their desire to see this legislation pass in the Legislature.

Those are just some of the individuals who have come forward representing various groups in our province that, in particular, deal daily with the challenges in our health care field. They have supported this openness that we have the opportunity to create, and a barrier, frankly, that

we have the opportunity to knock down between patients and their providers. I think we know, and I heard certainly some of the health care professionals speak about this, that if something adverse happens in the health care field, happens to the patient, they are not given perhaps the information that they should have following that, because the lines of communication are essentially cut off, in many ways. In part, that's a reality simply because of the insurance practices that are currently in place in the province of Ontario, where the insurance provider will say to the physician or the nurse or the other health care professional, "If you take any responsibility for this, if you admit any blame or guilt, we're not going to cover you. If you're sued civilly, we're simply not going to provide the legal resources that you will need to mount a defence to this."

So it really creates a problem with health care providers, with patients, and with the people of Ontario. This is a really important barrier that we are potentially removing in the province, which allows us to move forward. Certainly, as the nurses and doctors have told me, they want to have this communication with the patients that they see. They don't want this barrier any more than anyone else wants this in the province of Ontario.

One of the other aspects of the bill that I would like to speak about that supports the legislation moving forward is the research that has been done that substantiates the importance of the bill. Our experience in this country is a bit more limited. British Columbia was the first province to pass this bill, but it was in 2006, so we're only a couple of years into the experience of this legislation in this country and there is not a substantial amount of evidence to refer to. But the American experience, which is much longer, really gives us more of a base for moving forward in some of these regards.

I'm going to just make reference to the other benefits that, really, passing this type of legislation helps us with.

Since 2002, the hospitals at the University of Michigan Health System have encouraged physicians to apologize for mistakes. Malpractice lawsuits and notices of intent to sue have fallen from 262 filed in 2001 to about 130 a year, and legal fees have dropped from about \$3 million to \$1 million. That's really being driven by the fact that the individuals who feel that they may have been wronged want an apology. We all know of individuals who perhaps have brought cases to a civil court who simply say "Well, I want an apology, and if somebody would simply apologize to me for what's happened, take the responsibility, we could move on."

I'll give you a specific example in Lexington, Kentucky, a veterans' administration hospital, from the Physician's News Digest, 2005. After adopting a program of disclosure and compensation, they saw the average malpractice award drop from about \$100,000 to \$15,000. Less than 10% of the malpractice claims were filed in court; most of them were resolved prior. So it indicates that this isn't something that is simply a financial benefit to our hospital sector or our health care

sector, although we know that will be a benefit. The reality is, it's important to move forward because this is the right thing to do. It's the right thing to do for patients; it's the right thing to do for physicians and nurses as well.

I'll leave with you one other example—perhaps two. The American Bar Association Journal in 1999 indicated that 30% of all plaintiffs claimed that they would not have launched a civil action had an apology been provided.

1620 I know that there are others who want to speak to this bill and share some time with my colleagues on this as well, and the research very clearly indicates that it's important to move forward with this.

The other point we need to acknowledge is that while some people might say that moving forward with apologies is a convenient way for certain people who might want to avoid the legal repercussions of having a civil suit launched against them, I think it's important to remember that this bill does not preclude anybody in any way from moving forward with a legal case before a civil court and won't take one penny from anyone who is legally entitled to compensation. That's really important. Some people will say, "What if we get these pseudo apologies, these apologies that are not really sincere, and people will make these comments that they don't mean because they know it might help avoid a legal case?" We can't legislate sincerity, and only the individual who's receiving the apology will know whether or not that apology was given genuinely, and with the intent and in a way that it should be, and they'll have to assess that. Again, it doesn't preclude anybody from moving forward with a case.

I want to thank the Attorney General and members of our government supporting this. I encourage all members of the House to support this legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Willowdale.

Mr. David Zimmer: I'm pleased to rise in support of Bill 108, the Apology Act, 2008, introduced by the Attorney General on October 7. I do want to recognize the tremendous piece of work that the member for Sault Ste. Marie, Mr. David Oraziotti, has done to bring this bill forward to our caucus, to the Attorney General's attention and to the attention of this Legislature.

I'm sure all members will recognize that in life a sincere apology for wrongdoing or a mistake is part of one's natural human interaction, their natural reaction to a tragedy, to a mistake, to an error. We're all taught at an early age to say, "I'm sorry," when we make a mistake or cause harm, whether it's intentional or unintentional. Most of us keep that habit as we grow into adults. It helps maintain civil relations, whether in a crowded society or indeed in a small household or in a one-on-one personal relationship. But the problem is that the law often gets in the way of these honest and heartfelt apologies. People are reluctant to apologize when they've caused a harm, a problem or a mistake especially when, and particularly

when, they're facing the pressure that somehow the apology is going to come back to haunt them in the context of a lawsuit. In fact, I'm a lawyer. There are lots of lawyers in this Legislature. Lawyers have often advised clients not to apologize when they're in a situation of mistake, error or wrongdoing. Professional organizations and associations, insurance companies, insurance adjusters, often advise their clients not to apologize and not to recognize errors that may have been made, because later on down that road, in a liability suit, that apology, that expression of regret, that heartfelt reaction to a mistake or an error comes back to haunt you. Add to this the fact that often insurance companies have provisions in their coverage to say something to the effect that coverage for damages arising out of a mistake, an error or an accident are revoked if the policyholder jeopardizes the insurance company's position on liability by virtue of an apology that that individual has felt in their heart of hearts they want to make.

The law should not stand between the harmed and someone causing the harm from providing an apology and for setting up the context in which that apology and expression of common decency will often go a long, long way to resolve the anguish felt between the person who has committed the error, committed the wrong, made the mistake, and the person who has suffered as a result of it.

This proposed bill will change the law to allow people to freely apologize. The legislation, if passed, will allow people to apologize for a mistake or wrongdoing without fear that the apology could be used in lawsuits against them. But you must keep in mind: It would not, however, allow an apology to get in the way of a victim's ability to seek compensation for any harm that's done. Under this proposed bill, an apology would not be an admission of fault and could not be used as evidence to prove fault or liability relating to the matter for which someone apologizes. It would also prohibit an insurance company, for instance, from denying coverage to policyholders who apologize. Indeed, in an environment where an apology is inadmissible as proof of liability, insurance companies would no longer have any reason to deny coverage.

This legislation, if passed, will go a long way to restore a level of human compassion to relationships in times of pain. For example, when a medical procedure has gone wrong or someone has hurt someone else, it'll take away that gut-wrenching fear that people have and organizations feel that if they apologize under the current rules in the system, somehow that's going to come back to haunt them later in a civil lawsuit. People don't have to be worried anymore that if they make that heartfelt apology, that heartfelt expression of regret, that expression of compassion will be used as evidence of liability in a lawsuit and other civil proceedings. The legislation is going to remove the legal barriers that stand in the way of a human's natural instinct to express regret, to share someone's pain, to share someone's feelings by way of an apology. It's going to allow and create a context in which these very important, sincere and, many times, just instantaneous expressions of regret are offered. It's the

right thing to do to set a context where people can offer a sincere apology or an expression of regret without fear of the consequences of making that expression.

Many studies show that timely and sincere apologies often reduce the anger of the victims of the error, mistake or harm. Rather than feeling neglected and uncared-for, they are seeing that their hurt has been recognized. This can be a very, very powerful moment on the path to recovery and reconciliation of the harm that has arisen as a result of the error or the mistake, especially when you compare it to what the victim feels in the absence of an expression of apology, especially in those situations where any person of a normal moral compass would expect an apology or an expression of regret.

We are changing the context so that that natural instinct, that natural moral compass that you have to apologize for an error or a wrong, can be made without fear of later liabilities in a civil action. We want to give people who have been harmed the tools so that they can move on beyond the harm or the error or the tragedy. It actually gives both parties, the party who has perhaps made the error and the party who's the victim of the error—it enables both of them, the apologizer and the recipient of the apology, to reconcile, to put this tragedy and the consequences of this mistake behind them.

The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, David Caplan, in a statement to the House when this bill was first introduced, emphasized the importance of communicating information to patients when harm occurs as a result of errors in health care that has been provided. Minister Caplan said that, in his view, the apology would help to build and re-establish rapport and trust between patients and their families and the health care provider, and support open and honest communication. To the extent that we can restore and keep those lines of honest communication open and keep that relationship alive and healthy and in a state of well-being, that's a desirable result, and this Apology Act will again create the context in which that relationship can be maintained through the expression of regret, apology and sympathy.

1630

By removing legal barriers to the offering of apologies, organizations like hospitals and other public institutions can now apologize, can now make an expression of regret for an accident or a wrongdoing, including admitting a fault. Absent concern that an apology would necessarily lead to a costly lawsuit, much-needed openness and communication can occur. An apology can support healing in many ways—emotionally, psychologically and physically—by opening communication and providing information that can support the caring that's going to be needed to restore that relationship.

I just want to wrap up and say that, as a former practising lawyer in the civil bar for many years and in the criminal bar for some years, I often saw these situations where, in my judgment, an expression of sincere regret, an apology with sincere regret for an error or harm, would have gone a long way to repair the relationship, to enable the parties to settle into a context

where they could resolve and get beyond the harm that was caused.

This legislation will enhance that kind of a reciprocal, caring, constructive relationship. That's why it's important to support this legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I certainly was listening to the comments on Bill 108. Our major speaker will be Christine Elliott, and as a lawyer, she knows the issues around the Apology Act.

Today, we had a more interesting comment from the Minister of Finance announcing that we are going into deficit in the province of Ontario. So here's what I think. We're talking about the Apology Act, Bill 108, and I think the Premier and the Minister of Finance should have apologized to the people of Ontario.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: No, here's the point. There's a \$500-million deficit that you can see, that's admitted to, but it's about \$1.1 billion shown as what they're going to save sometime over the balance of the fiscal year. Now, \$500 million is less than half—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Durham, I'm really trying, but—

Mr. John O'Toole: Well—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I know, but I think you're really stretching it. This isn't part of that bill, so I would ask you to speak to the comments that were made by the previous speakers.

Mr. John O'Toole: I did listen. The member from Willowdale is a lawyer, I know that, and he's a fair-minded person. I'd ask him, in his two-minute response, to address whether or not it's appropriate for the McGuinty government to promise one thing and do another. It's sort of like promising the victim that you're going to resolve the issue and then not resolving the issue.

This is what an apology is about to the public, but if you give and forgive, I think that's important. In civility in our society, it's important to extend the hand. And I say that in the Maher Arar case, which started prior to the Stephen Harper government. They actually tried to solve that problem, and the truth and reconciliation committee of the Stephen Harper government is extending that olive branch of apology, making it right. I don't see that conciliatory approach from Dalton McGuinty in the times of trouble for the families of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim Brownell: It's a pleasure to be here this afternoon to speak on Bill 108, An Act respecting apologies, better known as the Apology Act.

I first of all want to commend and tell this House how much I appreciate the work of the member from Sault Ste. Marie, who first brought it to the attention of this House and—

Mr. Jeff Leal: A real leader.

Mr. Jim Brownell: A real leader, for sure.

It certainly shows the interest of this government in taking up on the ideas that are presented in the Legislature, and I have to say, with this and others, the member from Sault Ste. Marie has done very well.

This afternoon, as I listened to this, I thought of my own life and apologizing for mistakes and wrongdoings and always being told that it was the right thing to do. I grew up in a family of 12 kids, and my high school years were years when 14 of us lived under one roof. I remember many times throughout those years living at that farm that I was asked to apologize.

This goes a step further. Certainly, if this is passed, it would help to remove the legal barriers to our natural instincts and allow that very important and sincere expression of apology to happen. We heard that this afternoon in the words from the member from Willowdale, and we certainly heard it from the Attorney General. It would contribute to a stronger, healthier and more civil society for all Ontarians. As I think we heard this afternoon, the act would allow individuals and organizations to apologize for an accident or wrongdoing without fear that the apology would be used as evidence of liability in a legal proceeding, and this is exactly what we need here in Ontario. So I want to thank those who made contributions this afternoon.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I'm very pleased to have a chance to join in this debate this afternoon, and in particular to recognize the work that's been done by our colleague on this side of the House, David Oraziotti, who brought forward a bill by working with stakeholders and really brought a new and innovative idea to the floor of the Legislature.

I join with my colleague across the way, and also as a lawyer do acknowledge the importance of an opportunity for clients to be able to do what is the human and desirous thing to do, to say that you're sorry when something transpires. Our laws should not discourage people from apologizing for the harm that they do. They are integral to healing and they are integral to helping a community do well and to continue.

What is accidental or unintentional is the critical element here. As has been said, there's nothing in this legislation that prevents legitimate claims from being brought forward, and they should be. I have had the privilege to represent many clients who needed to bring those lawsuits forward because, in fact, they needed the financial assistance to be able to live out their lives; they needed to have redress brought forward for something that had taken place. But at the heart of it, if you had an opportunity to speak to those individuals, in many instances they also wished that many years before the litigation reached its ultimate time in a courtroom, someone had said they were sorry.

That's what this Apology Act allows. I'm very pleased that the Attorney General has brought it forward, and I'm pleased to stand in support of it today and also to

recognize the work done by my colleague from Sault Ste. Marie.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments? Response?

Mr. David Zimmer: We've heard from members of the Legislature here, and, in my judgment, they all appear to be on board in support of this legislation. That's not surprising; that they are in support of this legislation; because of the legislation that I've seen in the last five and a half years that I have been here, this is one that really cries out from the heart to do. If there's anything that any of us can do to resolve and to quiet the acrimony, the depression, the anger, the disappointment, the frustration that develops in the context of resolving a dispute over how a harm happened, in the context particularly of a civil litigation or another administrative proceeding, any of the members here—and I suppose a few have been involved in litigation from time to time—can realize how stressful and how heart-rending it can be. If this legislation is passed, we will have gone a long, long way to restore relationships, to provide that context, that stage in which people can repair a relationship that has been temporarily and unsuspectingly, perhaps, fractured because of a harm.

A sincere apology, a regret which flows from deep within us and points in the direction that our moral compass, in all circumstances, directs us to move in—in the direction of reconciliation, in the direction of apology, in the direction of shared regret—is good for the citizens of Ontario. That's why all members of this Legislature, in my judgment, would appear to be supporting this legislation.

1640

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I appreciate the opportunity to comment briefly on Bill 108, the Apology Act, but before I make my specific comments with respect to the bill, I'd appreciate, with your indulgence, a few moments just by way of preamble to set the backdrop for my comments. I really feel compelled to comment today on the irony of a second reading debate on this bill being brought forward today, immediately following the Minister of Finance's economic statement. In the face of global economic difficulties, in the face of record surpluses in the last number of years here in the province of Ontario, and knowing that there have been economic storm clouds on the horizon for at least the last year, what do we have—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member, take your seat for a minute. It really puts me in a difficult position, because my responsibility is to see that speakers speak to the bill that's before us. So I would appreciate it if you speak to the particular bill, Bill 108.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Very well, Mr. Speaker, I will do that, and I will get to the point directly because after the devastation of our manufacturing sector, after all of the difficult situations with hundreds of thousands of people left out of work in this province—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Perhaps you didn't understand me. I really don't want to move on to another speaker, but it puts me in a difficult position, because I could be criticized for not having members speak to the bill that's before us. So please do.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Very well, Mr. Speaker. I will do that, and I will comment, if I may, that after everything we've heard today, what have we got before us but the Apology Act? I must comment that I have not heard about the need for an Apology Act from any of my constituents at all: not this month, not this year, not since I was elected to this place in March 2006. And yet, here we are: We're debating this piece of legislation when we've got this situation.

I've commented on this bill two times before, once when it was brought forward as a private member's bill in May this year by the member from Sault Ste. Marie, and I've already commented that I agree with it in principle. I also commented on it when it was first brought before this Legislature several weeks ago for first reading, and I understand what the comments are. But I really have to say that I understand there has been apology legislation brought before British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and most recently in the Yukon. I'd also like to quote, if I may, from the comments that were made in the Yukon Legislature, which turned down apology legislation on April 30, 2008, at second reading, where it said:

"The fact that the Official Opposition has once again brought this forward demonstrates that they have placed a higher priority on an apology act that has huge questions related to it nationally here and in the Yukon. They have placed that as a priority over and above education. They've placed that as a priority over and above health care. They have placed that as a priority over and above investing in infrastructure. They've placed that as a priority over and above the continuing growth of investments and in diversifying our private sector economy. They've placed that over and above good governance in this territory. They've placed that over and above the public's business. I think it is a demonstration of how disconnected and out of touch the Official Opposition is with the Yukon of today.

"The government will now stand down on this bill and when comes time to vote, we will vote against it, because at this time there is far too much important business before this House yet to be dealt with on behalf of the Yukon public." And so I would say I agree: There are far more important things that we should be dealing with in this Legislature at this time, with the economy being in the situation it is.

Having said that, I will comment specifically with respect to the bill. There are still many questions that are unanswered with respect to this bill. There are some issues that I can understand, that there is a value being placed in an honest and sincere apology, but I think, as legislators, and particularly for those of us who are lawyers in this place, we also need to recognize that there are other considerations that need to be brought forward,

and that is the protection of our clients. My fear is that in some of these cases there will be situations where there are going to be plaintiffs who are not going to feel that they will have the ability to bring forward their cases because of a fear that an apology has been rendered, and therefore all is well. That may not be the case in certain parts of the province of Ontario, and I am concerned about that, because I have heard from very many people in my constituency office about the serious problems they have in bringing forward litigation in the first place due to the high cost of access to justice here in the province of Ontario, due to the fact that it's very difficult to succeed in almost any case, as it is with a medical malpractice claim, however meritorious it may be. We need to weigh that against the value of a simple apology because there are concerns about that, and I think we need to hear from other people who are far more expert than I am on this.

The other issue that I have a concern about is that it may be seen as a boilerplate kind of action that may lack any real significance in the course of litigation, and there are also several technical issues that I think we need to get some legal advice on with respect to admissions of liability in both criminal and civil cases. So there are some significant concerns. Again, I do support in it principle, although I think there are other issues that are far more pressing that we should be dealing with here in this Legislature. But I look forward to this matter going to committee. I would urge the government to give this full debate and full opportunity for all who are interested in presenting in committee, including health care professionals and lawyers who are going to be dealing with it. I do look forward to hearing from members of the Ontario Bar Association, an organization that I have great regard for. We have heard from the alternative dispute resolution section of the ADR, who is in support of this bill. But we need to hear from the other sections of the bar association, the litigation section, the health care section and many others, so that we get a full, completely rounded picture of exactly where we're going to go with this legislation. Most importantly, we need to hear from Ontarians across this province about their concerns and issues with this legislation as we move forward.

I think there are a lot of unanswered questions, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate your allowing me to continue to participate in this debate, and I look forward to hearing from the presenters in committee as we move forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Kormos: I'll be speaking to this bill on behalf of New Democrats in around 10 minutes' time, but I want to thank the member from Whitby-Oshawa for her comments on this legislation. I recall her comments when the bill was introduced as a private member's bill. That was back in May 2008. There was second reading of the bill on that occasion.

I think the member has some very important things to say about the bill. Its promoters would like it to be as simple as the parliamentary assistant to the Attorney

General would want it to appear to be, but with respect, I don't think it's that simple. I think Mrs. Elliott, during the course of what I hope are thorough committee hearings—because it really does warrant thorough committee hearings. The public could care less, I suspect, about the debate around this bill. Nonetheless—it's not unlike a whole lot of things that tend to get discussed here—there are some very important implications in this legislation for innocent victims. I want to speak to that in a few minutes' time. I know Mrs. Elliott, the member for Whitby-Oshawa, with her personal background and the research she has done in this matter, has a great deal to contribute. It's my hope and expectation, and perhaps the government members would be prepared to indicate now that this bill—and I'm confident it's going pass second reading. I don't think the Attorney General has to worry. He's got the numbers. I don't support the bill—New Democrats don't support the bill—but I'm confident it's going to get passed.

1650

It's important that it go out to committee hearings, and that's where the member from Whitby-Durham will be even more valuable than here in the course of this debate: in the querying that's going to have to be done around people who are going to be directly impacted and, most specifically, innocent victims of some of the most nefarious conduct.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: Just reflecting on what the member from Whitby-Oshawa was saying: After being around here for a number of years, I never underestimate the amount of things we still have to learn, nor to undervalue any initiative that comes from a private member.

I remember, as a member in opposition, that I put forward a bill asking for the province of Ontario to introduce portable heart defibrillators in public places—

Mr. Peter Kormos: And I supported it.

Mr. Mike Colle: I know, but do you remember what the response was of the government party of the time? They said, "This is not important." In fact, when the bill went to committee, they even voted against the title of the bill. That's how angry—and they said, "This bill is from a member of the opposition. Nobody's asking for portable heart defibrillators." So the government of the day—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): No, it's not. Today's the day for lessons, I guess. Questions and comments are intended for you to have the opportunity to speak to the comments made by the member. I think we're getting a bit away from that.

Mr. Mike Colle: The member stood up in this House and said, "This bill is not worth debating; we've got better things to do." I was saying, that was the same thing that happened when I brought forward a private member's bill. So I'm saying that whether it's this bill or other bills, I don't want to be the judge of what we should be discussing or debating in this House, because everything

has some merit and we're here to listen; we're not here to judge. We're not all judges and lawyers. We're representing ordinary people who sometimes have ideas that are of concern to them but may not be a concern to us. Let's give it a hearing. That's what the government is saying: Let's debate it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I just want to get up and respond, as our critic, Ms. Elliott, who's from Whitby-Oshawa, has all of the qualifications as our critic as a person who has practised law. I looked at her response when Mr. Bentley introduced this bill on October 7, and she made a very good point which I believe she was trying to make today, and with your indulgence I'll read her remarks.

She referred to a paper written by Benjamin Bathgate and Joseph C. D'Angelo called "Better Safe Than Sorry? The Role of Apologies in Litigation." What it went on to say is that there's a potential for trivialization of the apology. It would presuppose that people are moving on with life. That's a valid concern that she has raised.

At the same time, if you look at the legislation, in all due respect, I don't think there's—the sentiment of it, most of us would agree with. But when you look at this idea, it would have unintended consequences without a thorough examination. At the very least, we would be calling for public hearings. She has outlined some of the stakeholders in the legal community. Certainly we'd like to hear from the experts. I think that's the point she was trying to make.

She also, in her remarks today, pointed out that in other Legislatures this idea that it can be trivialized—the legitimate, legal rights of petitioners or persons who are plaintiffs in a class action or whatever—may feel that the general public might say, "Oh, look; we've said we're sorry," and think that the judge or the jury or the process may dismiss the plaintiff's case for their being injured or harmed.

I think it's worth listening and being convinced that we are interested. Yet the bill itself is less than half a page and we've already spent considerable time on a bill that needs to go to public hearings—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I'd be the first person to recognize that from time to time there are pieces of legislation that come forward in this House—Bill 108, An Act respecting apologies, gives me an opportunity to learn a whole new dimension about things.

I'd be the first guy to recognize that the member from Whitby-Oshawa is a very distinguished lawyer in the province of Ontario, a very learned person. I believe that this bill will go to committee and there will be an opportunity for a whole series of witnesses to come forward. They will certainly bring forward a variety of views on this issue, and the member from Whitby-Oshawa will probably be a committee member and certainly will facilitate the opportunity of going forward with these witnesses to elicit a variety of opinions.

I want to congratulate my colleague the member from Sault Ste. Marie, who I think showed a great deal of leadership in bringing this initiative forward as a private member's bill. Indeed, he heard from constituents in his riding of Sault Ste. Marie that this was important to them, and being the good member that he is, he brought forward those concerns, enshrined them in a private member's bill, introduced it into the House. It had a wide and extensive debate where a variety of opinions were put on the record, and now the government, under the leadership of the Attorney General, has decided to bring it forward as a piece of legislation. It will go to a committee, an opportunity to hear a lot of views on this issue. I've read a number of articles in the newspaper that say there is a wide variety of people who think this would be a very positive step forward in the province of Ontario. I look forward to those committee hearings and an opportunity to have a very thorough debate on Bill 108.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Whitby—Oshawa, you have two minutes to respond.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I do appreciate the comments from the members from Eglinton—Lawrence, Durham and Peterborough.

I would just like to clarify that, in my comments, in no way did I mean to suggest that Bill 108, the Apology Act, was unimportant. I merely was suggesting that there were other priorities that we could be dealing with at this very difficult economic time.

However, I do recognize that the member from Sault Ste. Marie and the Attorney General are sincere in bringing this legislation forward. I have tried to make comments that I hope will be helpful in stressing the need to get this bill into committee, because I really don't know that there's much more to be gained from further debate at this point. I think all parties recognize that there is a need to get further information from people who are truly experts in this field. I certainly don't claim to be one of them. I know that we need to hear from all parties who are involved in these types of litigation, litigation that can be prevented.

My biggest concern is that we don't try to save on litigation. I heard the member from Sault Ste. Marie indicate that up to 30% of all malpractice claims could be prevented if an apology had been rendered. That may be true, but if they were meritorious claims, they should be brought forward; it shouldn't be a simple matter of an apology that prevents people. So I am concerned that people who have claims do get their day in court. It's not just a question of saving money and saving court time, although that's important where it should be done. In cases where you're cutting out litigation by simply having an apology, I am very concerned about that, and I think we do really need to hear from the experts in the field to tell us whether that is a well-founded fear or not.

I do look forward to hearing the able submissions that I'm sure we'll be hearing in committee on this issue.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I'm pleased to be doing the lead, if you will, on behalf of the NDP.

I indicated a few minutes ago and I repeat, just so people understand very clearly, that the NDP, myself included, do not support this legislation. I will, over the course of the next short while, make every effort to explain why.

I do, however, want to commend the parliamentary assistant. There's a tradition here that goes back a long time, especially on lead speeches and ideally throughout the course of second reading debate or third reading debate, that either the minister who sponsors the bill or his or her parliamentary assistant remain in the chamber. Mr. Zimmer, the member for Willowdale, has consistently, as a PA for the Attorney General, fulfilled that responsibility.

Of course, that means he does all the heavy lifting—he does. It means that when a bill blows up in the government's face, he takes the blame, and when a bill—a rare one—is successful, the Attorney General takes the credit and Mr. Zimmer is pushed off to the sidelines. It takes a person of character to tolerate that, especially when it happens over and over again.

1700

I recall the first reading introduction by the member when it was a private member's bill. I recall at the time, before having read the bill, indicating very clearly that I found the proposition of interest. I was familiar with the apology legislation that had been passed in the United States and Australia, and that was beginning to be passed in Canada. Let's put this in perspective.

On March 25, 2008, the Ontario Bar Association wrote to the Attorney General and requested him to introduce for passage apology legislation very much of the type we've got before us for second reading today, which reflected the proposed Uniform Apology Act that had just been discussed at the Uniform Law Conference of Canada. In fact, that's what we've got here; that's what we had in the private member's bill.

I indicated, during the course of the brief debate—you only have an hour to debate private members' public business—around the private member's bill that I was concerned about the exclusion of admissions of liability that this bill provides for. Let's not confuse this with apologies. There are apologies and there are admissions of liability. I indicated then that I could understand the rationale for the exclusion of apologies—expressions of regret. But I was hard pressed to understand why, for an innocent accident victim—the victim of a drunk driver, the victim of a negligent doctor, the victim of a negligent hospital, the victim of a dangerous spouse who beats his wife, I suppose, or its spouse, to be hyper-politically correct, into a crippled state—an admission of liability should not be capable of being introduced as evidence against the perpetrator of the harm.

You've got a constituency office, like everybody else here, and you know, like I'm sure everybody else here, that people come into your office, victims of harm who talk about a system that is, more often than not, un-

favourable to the innocent victim and far more favourable to the insurance company with the deep pockets and the high-priced law firms, and the frustration they encounter and feel in getting justice arrived at.

Let me put it this way, as I did back in May. Take a look at the act. Take a look at section 1. Take a look at what "apology" means in this legislation. I know the parliamentary assistant will be doing this very carefully, because he's a person of conscience. "Apology" means an expression of sympathy or regret." We understand that. "I'm sorry that you're lying in this intersection with both of your legs broken and your pelvis shattered." That's an expression of sympathy or regret. "I'm sorry that you're lying in this intersection in a pool of blood with both legs broken and your pelvis shattered."

I agree, as I indicated back in May, that there's sound, good reason to prevent that expression of regret from being used as an indicator or evidence of liability. In fact, a big chunk—the biggest chunk, so far as I'm aware—of the American jurisdictions that have apology legislation exclude that apology, the apology of regret, because people recognize that one can express regret, and we do every day, about other people's misfortune without in any way acknowledging, never mind admitting, our liability, our role as the party causing that misfortune.

We send sympathy notes every day to our friends and colleagues and so on, expressions of regret about the death of a loved one, but we're by no means indicating, by doing that, that we're responsible or even have any connection whatsoever with the death of that loved one. I can be sorry that your dog died, but expressing that, even in clear and unequivocal terms—or usually in unclear and equivocal terms—shouldn't be taken as an expression of admission of liability.

But let's go back to the person lying in the intersection of the roadway, both legs broken, pelvis shattered, in a pool of blood and body fluids. To say "I'm sorry" is one thing. To say "I'm sorry; I shouldn't have been drinking while I was driving my car because it caused me to go through the red light and mow you down while you were but a pedestrian and an innocent victim"—that, you see, is an apology and an admission of liability. And there's an effort on the part of the proponents of this legislation to somehow suggest that it's the mere expression of regret that's going to be excluded from admissibility, excluded from being used as evidence. No. It is the hard, absolute admission of liability. As I say, innocent accident victims, and innocent victims, have a difficult enough time without having yet another burden in terms of the evidentiary burden.

There's somehow the suggestion that an apology seals. Tell that to the paraplegic who has lost the use of half of his or her body, or the quadriplegic who can't move from the neck down. Tell that to the 19-year-old first-year university student who is the victim of a drunk driver and who will never finish the year because he or she has head injury, brain injury—that an apology by the wrongdoer is going to heal them. Horse feathers. What

absolute bunkum. It is repugnant to suggest that. It's not just inaccurate or unfair; it's downright repugnant.

Let's take a look. There are any number of ways, when you look at legislation—and that goes for any member here—of saying, "Hmm, how am I as an MPP, as a member of this assembly, going to respond to this particular legislation?" One of the ways you do it is by looking at who supports it. Let's take a look at who supports this bill. The insurance companies—oh, under the guise of the physicians, because they have their own self-insurance operation, huh? Hospitals. Other people in the medical profession.

Let's put this in perspective. This is about minimizing exposure—not minimizing de facto liability but minimizing exposure—the amount that would have to be paid to an innocent victim of negligence or, even worse, beyond negligence, outright attacks on the body.

Heck, this legislation would—because don't forget, O.J. Simpson was never found criminally guilty, was he? He was found not guilty: the old glove and all that stuff. But in the civil court he was found liable. If this legislation were in effect, O.J. Simpson could have waited until after his criminal trial and then gone on the Jay Leno show, or whatever he wanted to go on, and apologized for the vicious slaughter of his wife. The family could not have used that admission in the civil action against O.J. Simpson, which is the only place the family ever got justice. I don't think there's a single person who's familiar with that notorious case who doesn't believe that the civil finding of liability was appropriate and that he escaped criminal justice because of the nature of the criminal justice system: proof beyond a reasonable doubt, I suppose; the ability of the jury to find what? A perverse verdict?

1710

This is very scary stuff. I understand the interest in wanting people to sit down and apologize to one another and be happy forever and ever. Again, reference has been made to the fact that we grow up apologizing and that when you're grown up, when you have a relationship, you apologize even more frequently, especially if you want to keep the relationship. But you see, there is no real relationship that is expected to be ongoing and permanent between the paraplegic, the quadriplegic mowed down by a drunk driver, and that drunk driver's insurance company. The quadriplegic could care less what the insurance company is, who its CEO is, who its president is. I don't for a minute doubt the potency of an apology to some victims, especially when a victim has been waiting and waiting and waiting, especially when the insurance company's lawyers have been dragging the case through discovery and all sorts of—what do they call them?—interlocutory motions. And when the innocent victim's lawyer has had to leave the case because of lack of funds, and then the person has to look for another lawyer, and the person may need to get legal aid or persuade legal aid to give them a certificate and get a lawyer on whatever it is that legal aid pays now—\$70 an hour or \$80 an hour—you're hard-pressed to find counsel

prepared to work on a serious personal injury case for that kind of fee. They just can't afford to. It won't support the support staff; it won't pay the rent. The insurance company: I hate to put it this way, but the insurance companies are not nice people. They're not well known for their heart or their soul. Insurance companies are all about making money.

This bill is very interesting because it resurrected for me—it was as if David Peterson were the Premier again—some of the very same feelings as well as the language that was used during the no-fault debate back in 1989 and 1990, where again innocent accident victims were under attack. Interestingly, it was by a Liberal government as well.

Do you want to give an accident victim closure? Compensate them. You want to make them feel healed? Use, to whatever extent you can, monetary compensation to return their life to as close as it was before their brain was bashed into senselessness or before their legs or their legs and arms were rendered useless because of a spinal cord injury. Apology? Good grief. The proponents of this legislation are people who want to use the apology to lure or lull the long-suffering innocent victim who's the plaintiff in a civil action into settling. They want the opportunity to add some humanness.

Mrs. Elliott, the member for Whitby—Oshawa, has had occasion to talk about the phenomenon of the insincere apology—if you will, the fraudulent apology. Good grief. Political leaders have been making those kinds of apologies for a couple of decades now, haven't they? Bill Clinton, remember that one? Heck, Jimmy Swaggart, the televangelist from Baton Rouge, Louisiana: I remember watching that particular broadcast—remember?—where he apologized. He did it good, too. Remember that apology? It was the Lincoln Town Car he was driving on the airport strip in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, when he picked up a prostitute and got caught. He apologized and, by God, he cried. And the remarkable thing is that it worked. There was a little gap in cash flow, but by and large the money kept flowing. Do you think for a minute that that was a spontaneous apology? We're talking about a multi-million-dollar televangelist operation. Do you think for a minute that there weren't lawyers and spin doctors and damage control people and all those kinds of folks sitting there not only scripting it, but rehearsing it as well? You bet your boots there were. Is that what the government is talking about when it wants to encourage apologies?

Let's take it one further. Exactly what are they talking about? What do you mean, you can't apologize? Of course you can. What do you mean, you can't apologize and admit liability? Of course you can. Who is spreading that inaccuracy? It's certainly not the parliamentary assistant, because he knows better. He knows that there's a thing—and people like Mrs. Elliott know far more about this stuff than I do—called “settlement privilege” in this province, in this country, in the common law of civil procedure. Right, Mrs. Elliott? Any communication made in the course of settling a dispute is privileged. It

can't be introduced by either party. Again, Mrs. Elliott can correct me if I'm wrong, but the way I read it is that that privilege is the privilege of both parties, so it's not that one can relinquish it. Any communication is privileged. In other words, it can't be introduced in court. I'm surprised, I'm shocked, I'm awed, I'm amazed, my toes have curled, at having listened to the parliamentary assistant and not having heard him refer to settlement privilege. He has been around a long time. Maybe he forgot about it. Maybe it slipped his mind—because he has been here working diligently; he's not double-dipping. He has been here—well, he has. He's not operating a law office in addition to being a member of the Legislature and a parliamentary assistant.

Not only is there the common law of settlement privilege, but in Ontario—and again, if the parliamentary assistant's failure to mention settlement privilege curled my toes, this one rotted my socks. In Ontario, the rules of civil procedure—and by God, it's rule 24.1.14. Remember that one? In 24.1.14, “All communications at a mediation session and the mediator's notes and records shall be deemed to be without prejudice settlement discussions.”

“Humph,” Kormos said in response to that revelation.” So not only is there the common law rule of settlement privilege, but efforts in mediation to resolve a dispute—because of course the parliamentary assistant knows this: Up here in Toronto, you've got to take these disputes to mediators.

So the rules specifically provide for exchanges to and from and via a mediator or with each other in the course of mediation—and I'm talking about the parties: plaintiff and defence. The rules go beyond simply relying upon the common law of settlement privilege, even though the common law clearly applies. The provincial drafters of those rules wanted to make sure that those parties were protected by codification. So whether it's communication between two lawyers or even between, say, Mr. Zimmer and me—let's say Mr. Zimmer ran over my dog and killed him, and I was pretty upset about it. My dog is already dead, so he couldn't do that. But if he did run over my live dog and killed him, and if I said, “Mr. Zimmer, I don't think you were paying proper attention, and I want you to compensate me for the loss of Charlie,” the beagle, and I say, “because I'm going to sue you”—because as I understand it, and correct me if I'm wrong, Parliamentary Assistant, there has to be at least contemplation of litigation.

1720

Look, I just know what I can scan in a little bit of reading about this stuff and what folks tell me, but settlement efforts on our part, if there's litigation pending, are privileged. There's a good reason for that: because the courts historically have encouraged people to settle matters. There's a public policy. Mind you, hidden underneath that public policy of encouraging people to settle is, of course, the fact that we have a justice system that's so grossly underfunded and has become so horribly expensive for litigants that every effort is being used to

steer people away from the University Avenue courthouse into any number of alternatives, including settlement discussions and mediated settlements.

But I just happen to know—I think I read it in a book by those negotiation experts, Roger Fisher and William Ury. It seems to me that they identify the apology as a very potent tool in persuading the other party to come to the table, in breaking down the barriers. Oh, very clever people, Messrs. Fisher and Ury; very clever people, because they don't ask that the apology be authentic or sincere, just that it sound to be authentic or sincere.

I remember hearing a story about George Burns, that Hollywood comedian. Back in the 1950s, he and Gracie Allen were on radio and then on—

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Mrs. Elliott is nodding her head. She's too young; she doesn't know. But I remember George Burns and Gracie Allen. George Burns once, in the twilight of his career—he lived to be 100 or plus—was asked, "What's the secret of your great success?" George Burns—and he had this huge cigar that was a prop—replied to this interview: "The secret to my success is sincerity." He said, "And once you're able to fake sincerity, you've got it made."

So you see, the people who write the books don't expect the apology to be sincere; it's just got to appear sincere. If that means that a lawyer has to woodshed his or her client—sit down with them and go through the exercise more than a few times until that person has it down pat—and I'm talking about the feigned sincerity, lawyers do that. It's amazing.

The defence lawyers, the insurance company lawyers, are big fans of this legislation. These are the people who work for insurance companies. These are the lawyers who work for insurance companies, and I tell you, they're the ones who give credibility to the observation that lawyering is indeed the world's second-oldest profession. Defence lawyers love this proposal because it allows those defence lawyers, acting for the insurance companies, to lull a beleaguered victim into—because there are some huge dynamics that go on in these kinds of discussions. We're talking about somebody who's a victim; who, let's say, has been waiting five years and the case still hasn't gone to trial and he or she is still waiting to get on the trial list or, even worse, has been on the trial list more than once but then has been knocked off the list because another trial took too long. It's an incredible—you know the anguish that these people go through. They reach the point where they're incredibly vulnerable. The insurance companies will starve them into settlement because the insurance companies can outspend them in terms of lawyers, can outspend them in terms of those interlocutory motions and simply delay the matter, can outspend the innocent victims in terms of doing things that will delay.

Meanwhile, that innocent victim is going without any income, without any compensation, without the ramp she or he needs to get access to their folks' home, because if they're in a wheelchair and a paraplegic—worse, if

they're a quad—it means they probably move back in with their folks.

The ruse here is the apology, because an innocent victim who has been waiting for five years, whose body has been crippled, whose life has been stolen from him, will take anything after five or six or seven years. The apparent sincerity of a feigned apology can have a huge emotional impact, to the point where that person says, "Okay, what more can I expect? At least there's been an acknowledgment of the wrongdoing to me," and says to his or her lawyer or paralegal, "Look, I want to get out of here. I'm finished. It's over. I want out." But the remarkable thing is that in the course of settlement and mediation, the apology, including an admission of liability, is privileged anyway.

Now, some of the commentators on this legislation said, "The legislation is about protecting people's relationships with their insurers and not violating the contract of insurance." For Pete's sake, why don't you just pass legislation to that effect? That's silly. That's a silly comment, a silly observation, and it really doesn't do any credit to the people making that proposal.

Let's get down to what an apology is, anyway. This bill creates its own definition of "apology." There's been a whole lot of work done about what constitutes an apology.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: All that stuff going on behind the chair is distracting, isn't it, Speaker?

What is interesting is what, in fact, constitutes an apology. I had an interesting conversation at the London Conservative mini-convention when John Tory had the vote of confidence. That was, what, a year ago now? I was there. I had occasion to talk to Graham Murray, from Inside Queen's Park. I pointed out that my reading on the matter had indicated that a real apology has five characteristics: (1) It should be prompt, although remarkably there's some research that says that depending upon the type of case, don't make it too prompt, because then it seems just like a knee-jerk reaction. It's like when you're with your spouse in the car and she says something to you and you don't even listen to her; you just say, "Okay, I apologize." Your spouse knows that that's not a real apology, because you didn't even bother to think about what she was saying. I know you've never done that, but others have—a prompt apology.

As a matter of fact, one of the authors—and I know that Mrs. Elliott has read this particular paper as well—lists most of the five characteristics.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: That's right; that's the article.

(1) Speedy, prompt.

(2) Acknowledge the harm done to the victim. Whether it's the victim of an insult or a slight, or the victim of a drunk driver speeding his or her car through a lit intersection and a crosswalk, acknowledge the harm.

(3) Express sorrow for harm done to the victim. It's called contrition, remorse.

(4) Offer reparation that addresses the victim's needs.

If the government was really interested in encouraging apologies, they would insist that an apology have accompanying it reparation, because an apology just to minimize the amount that's going to have to be paid out in the course of a settlement, or an apology that's designed to short-circuit the process of an innocent victim seeking compensation—because that's what the government is contemplating: without reparation—according to some, really isn't an apology or much of an apology. It isn't an apology at all.

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And then, of course, in my view, the fifth element—I'm up to five now? Yeah. The fifth element is acknowledging not only the harm done—regret, sorrow, contrition, remorse, reparation—but then acknowledging that you're going to do something to make sure it doesn't happen again. That's not rocket science. Again, people do it in their homes on a daily basis when they're relating to the people that they have relationships with.

I'm concerned with the fact that there will be mediators advocating for this bill. I'm concerned because mediators are already covered, by virtue of the Ontario Rules of Civil Procedure—that was rule 24.1.14—and also because mediators know that the key to a logjam can often be that apology. A mediator will sit in a room—in this instance, with the insurance company's lawyers or the actual wrongdoer—and say, “You know, I think if you go back in there and apologize, we can get this process going.”

Oh, and I suspect there are going to be some mediators reading about what I've said—my comment about lawyers being the world's second-oldest profession—the defence bar, the insurance company lawyers. And, okay, I'll get the e-mails. Yeah, I'll get the e-mails, and I'll get the mail, God bless them. And I suspect there will be mediators as well who will give me a call or write me letters or send me e-mails, saying, “Oh, come on now.” Well, no, you come on now.

Nuts. I was close to wrapping up, but Ms. Smith caused me to look at the clock. She was tapping her watch and I thought she meant to look and note that I have 26 minutes left. So thank you very much, I say to the minister, Ms. Smith, for drawing my attention to the time that I still had, 26 minutes, because I was ready to fold this.

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Kormos: No, I appreciate—

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Sister, I appreciate it very much. I thank you, because I thought I'd exhausted my time. But she tapped her wristwatch and I looked and I've got 26 minutes.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: You've exhausted our time.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Look, there are some libertarian mediators out there for whom the scorecard is not the quality of the settlement but the fact that they have achieved a settlement. I say this legislation is designed to meet their interests as well, which isn't, as I say, to

ensure that there's a quality settlement but to assure a settlement. Because even though the mediation community says, “Oh, no, we don't count settlements as part of our success rate”—horse feathers—of course they do. Some mediators will bully and cajole, and, heck, I observed one where I swear that the Geneva rules regarding prisoners of war were being violated.

Interjection: In terms of what?

Mr. Peter Kormos: In terms of what? You know what I'm talking about, don't you, Mrs. Elliott? If I'm wrong, stand up on a point of order and say I'm wrong. You're not standing up. I understand. You've seen those same mediators. They'll do everything but slap people upside the head, and the problem is, the parties are afraid of that happening. So again—again—this is what's interesting about this legislation.

Now, what hasn't been acknowledged, the reference to these jurisdictions, these other jurisdictions, is that—oh, nuts. I'm sorry. I was distracted for a minute, Speaker.

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Kormos: You know what, Mrs. Elliott? If we do 10 minutes of questions and comments, we'll take this into the next day, so I think we should. I hope you're game, because here we are at 24—it looks like it will take us into 6-o'clock-plus.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I've been taken off track now by the parliamentary assistant and his colleague, his sidekick, Zorro and Pancho or whatever, the who's who—speaking of 1950s entertainment.

Look, the government hasn't explained the real motive in seeking this legislation. Nor has the government been candid about the fact that those American jurisdictions that it refers to exclude simply the simple apology, the expression of regret, from being used as evidence of liability. Nor has it explained how it's in the public interest that a clear admission of liability that isn't done because the only ones we've got left—you see, the common law settlement privilege and the rules of procedure protect and make privileged any communications that involve expressions of regret, apologies or admissions of liability—the whole gang already exclude them from being used as evidence.

Why shouldn't an innocent victim be allowed to use an admission of liability? If we're going to talk about a new moral climate, Mr. Zimmer, shouldn't we talk about people being prepared to accept responsibility for the harm they inflict? It seems to me that it's tit-for-tat, quid pro quo, here that a party who admits liability or, more importantly, causes harm, should be prepared to accept responsibility for that harm, and it seems to me that what the government is doing with this legislation is protecting the wrongdoer. I, for the life of me, don't see how that's part of some new moral order that the government says Bill 108 could lead us to—not in any way, shape or form.

Having said all of that, this is what I propose, and what I proposed to the Attorney General and his parliamentary assistant earlier: I'm quite satisfied if this debate wraps up this afternoon, and I want to remain focused on

that proposition. I'm quite satisfied that this debate for second reading wrap up this afternoon. We're going to have a vote, and I'm going to be voting against this bill. I suspect that that vote will be deferred until tomorrow, and then, when the Speaker asks, "Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?" I'm going to say no. I've got to prevent it from being called for third reading because I'm going to insist that it go to committee. What I dearly want—because I think the public is to a certain extent bored with the issue even though they haven't been exposed to it a whole lot. There's some charm to the fact that, "Oh, we can all apologize. We'll all sit down, burn incense and be happy."

A couple of weeks ago I was upset with Ed Greenspan because he wrote a column in the Sun about how we didn't have any need for trade unions anymore, so I wasn't happy with Mr. Greenspan on that day. But then, just a couple of days ago, I got to the Sun because I'm on the Internet first thing in the morning and pull up the Sun along with the Star, the Globe and the whole works, and here's Ed Greenspan with a critique of Bill 108. So I've forgotten all about my disappointment in him for criticizing trade unions, and I read his article thoroughly and carefully. So far, Ed Greenspan is the only lawyer I'm aware of who has spoken out against Bill 108.

Look, innocent accident victims aren't going to—because this bill just doesn't have enough immediateness, enough cogency, if you will, for those people. I want to hear from those plaintiffs' lawyers why they might support this legislation, because I, for the life of me, can't understand why a competent plaintiff's lawyer would ever support this legislation, knowing that apologies and admissions of liability that are done in the course of settlement or mediation are already protected. What do we need this for, then? Why would a plaintiff's lawyer deny his or her client the evidentiary value of a clear admission of liability? It seems to me that there's a strong public interest in making that happen.

Greenspan's column is interesting. He talks about some of the history of apologies. He writes, "In 2007, Harper apologized to Maher Arar, and bought his forgiveness for \$9 million.

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"And in 2008 he apologized to aboriginal groups, following a \$2 billion settlement.

"In 2009, who knows what else Harper will apologize for. Personally, I'd like him to apologize for the Maple Leafs."

There are elements of humour in the column.

He then goes on to talk about the insincerity of contrived apologies and how we are doing—in my view; infer this from what he writes, and he'll correct the record if he disagrees seriously enough with me or has any interest in disagreeing. Mrs. Elliott has already referred to this in her earlier comments, and I recall making mention of it as well. Greenspan writes about the impact of insincere apologies, contrived apologies, forced apologies, fake apologies, phony apologies, that live as their only purpose luring an innocent victim into

a settlement that is less than what that innocent victim deserves, or in fact causing them because they don't pursue a claim at all.

Greenspan writes, "We tell children to 'say you're sorry' and most kids begrudgingly do so.... But you and I know the kids don't really mean it. If my doctor harms me and then apologizes just because he doesn't want me to sue, that's not going to mean much to me."

I'm going to wrap up.

Mr. Mike Colle: No.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Mike Colle wants me to carry on, and I've got more references here, but I'm going to wrap this up, because the forum now is committee. I'm never going to reconcile with this proposal, with this legislation. I told you before that I could very much live, and I said in May that I could very much live, with legislation that barred the regret apology only, with no admission of liability, from being used as evidence.

The other interesting thing you've got to note is that the inadmissibility of the apology is only for the purpose of proving liability. It's not for the purpose of, let's say, reducing monetary damages. Interesting, ain't it, Mrs. Elliott? It isn't absolutely barred from being introduced. It's only barred from being introduced to prove liability. But it can be introduced as evidence for any other number of reasons, and we know what those are. It's going to be introduced by the defence itself to demonstrate—again, there are lawyers who know more about this than I do that I'm going to look forward to hearing from; I know Mrs. Elliott does. But the whole business of offers to settle—you know that little game of chicken that plaintiffs and defence lawyers play with each other on the issue of costs? It comes pretty close to that, because this bill will prevent the plaintiff from using the admission of liability, but will allow the defence to introduce it in mitigation of damages. I put that to you. Is that fair?

For that matter, what the heck, if a drunk driver can escape liability because his admission of liability, after he runs down your kid, is accompanied by an "I'm sorry, I was drunk as a skunk and mowed your kid down and left him or her crippled"—if that can't be used as evidence in a civil action, then what the heck, why doesn't this government say, "What's good for the goose is good for the gander. We'll prevent that from being used in a criminal action, because after all, he apologized, and we want to encourage apologies." What about that kid who B and E's some old lady's house who tells the cops, "I'm really sorry I B and E'd that house and stole all the family photographs, and I apologize." What the heck. If we're encouraging people to make amends, to heal—"heal," Mr. Zimmer said. It sounds like one of those tent preachers. If we're talking about healing, then why shouldn't the criminal, why shouldn't the break and enter artist, why shouldn't the mugger, be allowed to heal with an apology? Why is it only the drunk driver who can heal with an apology that won't be used as evidence? Why is it only the person who carelessly fires off a firearm into a crowd of people and cripples somebody, when he's sued

for civil liability, who can heal? Let's let criminals heal too. Let them apologize and admit liability and not have that admission of liability used against them. Silliness, ain't it, Speaker? Silliness.

I look forward to this going to a vote this afternoon and I will, of course, be joined by others in calling for a recorded vote, and I expect the vote will be deferred. That means that it will probably be tomorrow at around 11:30 a.m., and at that point I'll be taking the steps that have to be taken to ensure that this bill goes to committee. Thank you kindly.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I'm very pleased to provide comments on the member for Welland's comments on Bill 108. I just want to say from the outset that I will be supporting Bill 108.

I do want to thank the member for Sault Ste. Marie for all the work he has done in bringing this bill to today. I feel that it is an important bill. It does give the ability for people to heal. I know the member for Welland said that if someone is seriously hurt in an accident, how could this be part of the healing process? But it's not the whole healing process; it's the beginning of a healing process.

It is a natural instinct to say that you are sorry, and I do believe that it is—I sincerely believe—a part and a beginning of the healing process. I believe that people need forgiveness and they need the peace of mind so they can begin to heal within themselves, for both the party that was hurt and the party that caused the harm. But it's just a beginning and that's all it is. That's what this bill speaks to.

I really do think that after the many comments from the member for Welland—I just wish I had as long as he did so that I could respond. I'll look for that opportunity down the road and I will seize the time if I have the ability. This act would not allow wrongdoers to escape the consequences of their wrongdoing since it would not affect a victim's right to sue or the right to compensation for harm done. The act would not apply to any criminal or provincial offences prosecutions.

There's much more; I look forward to it. I did want to be on the record thanking the member for Sault Ste. Marie as well as stating that I will be supporting Bill 108.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments? Response?

Mr. Peter Kormos: Thank you kindly, Speaker. Look, saying "I'm sorry" doesn't heal a quadriplegic. Saying "I'm sorry" as you deliver a cheque so that the

quadriplegic can hire attendant care, so that the quadriplegic can replace lost income, that starts to heal.

This bill will allow for express admissions of liability to be excluded as evidence when sometimes that may be the only evidence an innocent victim has against a wrongdoer. What that means is that the victim can sue until he or she is blue in the face. You need evidence to win a suit, to win an action, and there are cases where the admission of the wrongdoer is the only evidence. I tell you that this legislation is a grave, grave injustice to innocent victims and it is a great service to the insurance companies and their lawyers. It is a great service to those who want innocent victims to pay instead of being compensated.

As I said, it's like the Peterson days. I remember reflecting on the Peterson days with Jim Bradley, who was here—the member for St. Catharines. I remember reflecting on the Peterson days. That Liberal government was so deep in the back pockets of the insurance industry that it was spitting out lint. It's now in the other back pocket and continues to spit out lint. The Liberals and the insurance industry are tied together at the hip. By gosh, surely they could seek more sympathetic friends than that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate? Does any other member wish to speak on this bill?

There being none, Mr. Bentley has moved second reading of Bill 108, An Act respecting apologies. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members; this will be a 30-minute bell.

I have received the appropriate document. Pursuant to standing order 28(h), the vote on the motion will be deferred until deferred votes on Thursday, October 23.

Second reading vote deferred.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move adjournment of the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

This House is adjourned until 9 of the clock Thursday, October 23.

The House adjourned at 1751.

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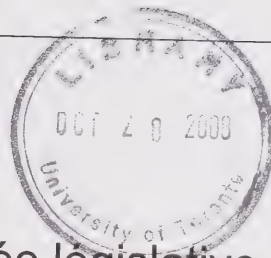


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(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Thursday 23 October 2008

Jeudi 23 octobre 2008

**Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters**

**Président
L'honorable Steve Peters**

**Clerk
Deborah Deller**

**Greffière
Deborah Deller**

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 23 October 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 23 octobre 2008

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a Jewish prayer.

Prayers.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: We have a page who is celebrating her birthday today. Chloe, judging from the twinkle in her eye, gets full measure from life. Happy birthday, Chloe.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): As the member knows, that's not a point of order, but happy birthday, Chloe.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO ECONOMY ÉCONOMIE DE L'ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 22, 2008, on the amendment to the amendment to the motion by Mr. McGuinty to acknowledge the economic challenges facing the province and continuing to implement an economic plan.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I guess today we have all come to the realization that this government's tax-and-spend policies have contributed to a situation where this once great, mighty province, which used to be the economic engine of Canada, now finds itself in a situation where we have not only seen the loss of a quarter of a million jobs but we're now finding ourselves in a deficit situation—a deficit situation which had been predicted, which people did see coming—based on the fact that this province and its leaders, Premier McGuinty and the finance minister, have continued to spend like drunken sailors and have refused to manage in a responsible way the hard-earned taxes that they take from corporations and from the citizens of this province.

I've seen this once before. I saw it when we had Premier Peterson here and when we had Bob Rae. This once great province at that time went from leadership into economic decline despite the efforts of individuals and entrepreneurs. We're certainly heading down that same slippery fiscal slope of decline one more time, simply because this Premier and this government can't say no to the demands. They've never learned to manage taxpayers' money. They've never learned to prioritize. It was disappointing yesterday to see that they hadn't

achieved any savings other than on the back of health care professionals and patients in this province. They decided that they were going to reduce the amount of money that had been allocated to hire 9,000 more nurses. They were going to slow the introduction of the family health teams in the province of Ontario—this at a time when we have an aging and a growing population, a population that is desperately searching for family doctors. There isn't a place you go in the province of Ontario where there aren't people who are looking for access to primary care.

That's why the decision yesterday by this government to make savings on the backs of patients was shocking—shocking to people throughout the province of Ontario, who feel further demoralized about their ability to have the access to care that they've been so desperately looking for. And then, to cut nursing—unbelievable. We have a desperate need for nurses in our long-term-care facilities. In fact, we don't have enough long-term-care beds in the province. We don't have doctors to meet the needs of those residents in the long-term-care beds. We don't have the nurses. Some of the homes simply can't find the staff to help the residents. And we're saying we're going to cut nurses further. Primary care—we need the nurses. Hospitals—we need the nurses. We have overcrowding. We have long wait times in our emergency rooms. Surgeries are being cancelled because we don't have the staff.

This government and its decision yesterday to achieve savings—limited savings, \$53 million worth of savings—on the backs of people, patients in the province of Ontario, is simply unbelievable, at a time when we need the most. You are now increasingly putting patient health and safety at risk. This has widespread consequences. Furthermore, yesterday you came out with a statement that indicated that you had made no effort whatsoever to stop your spending, whether it's for a party at the Windsor casino or whether it's cabinet ministers who choose to have meetings not in the buildings here, where the rent is free, but to go to expensive hotels and pay for food.

So we now find ourselves in a deficit—a deficit, by the way, that you're saying is only \$500 million, but a deficit that you know full well is much, much more than that. It's probably at least \$1.6 billion, and growing. Because you've made commitments; you don't prioritize; you don't manage taxpayers' money well; and unfortunately, you've now added to the debt for each family in the province of Ontario, since you took office in 2003, an additional burden of \$6,500.

You are starting to mortgage the future of my children and your children and your grandchildren. Somebody's going to have to pay for the increasing debt, the increased wild, carefree spending that you have engaged in and the beginning of a deficit that we know, over your term of office, is simply going to grow each and every day. Because you've never learned to govern in tough times. Your plan that you so boldly say is working isn't working. The programs that you've set up in 2005, and in this budget in 2008—people haven't even been able to access them. The money that was made available hasn't been spent, because people can't access the plan. Look at the latest plan to help the almost 250,000 unemployed workers, introduced with great fanfare by your Premier and the minister about six months ago. Only 600 people are accessing that plan. And the list goes on and on. There was no help yesterday for people—no help for the senior citizens who saw the mutual funds decline one more day. Believe me, it's frightening. We all have family members who are seniors on fixed incomes, and there was no hope and there was no plan. People have lost confidence in your government

0910

What about the small business person who has seen the number of regulations increase? There was no hope there. What about the person who's working for the larger business that has now decided that the economic environment in this province is not one that is conducive to growth? We're going to have more and more companies who are simply going to recognize that it's better to move to British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan or south of the border, because this province does not encourage economic growth. They are not creating an environment—

Interjection: You're taxing them out.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: You're taxing them.

Here's BC creating a climate that encourages job creation. The only jobs being created in the province of Ontario are public sector civil service jobs. Those are jobs that the taxpayers are having to pay for. You've got to rein in your spending. You've got to learn that there are priorities, and then what does your priority turn out to be? You cut nurses one more time and you reduce the family health teams. The only cuts that you made yesterday were not to your own spending, they were on the backs of patients and people in the province of Ontario. This once mighty province that led the way in economic growth, that was a magnet for investment, has now been reduced to a point where we simply are trailing. There's not going to be any economic growth. People are fleeing this province. People are being forced to leave, being encouraged by Saskatchewan to move west because that's where the jobs are.

So I would say to this government, you need to focus on the fact that you must come forward in the future with a plan. You need to understand the need to manage the finances with some respect for the taxpayers who are working hard these days, if they have a job, to help pay the taxes.

You have to remember there's a huge difference between this government and the Conservative government that you replaced. We created, with the help of the private sector, one million new jobs. You have contributed, through your policies, to the reduction of at least 230,000 manufacturing jobs, and as Don Drummond from TD Bank said not too long ago, there'll be another loss of 250,000 jobs if you don't come up with an economic plan that is going to stimulate not public sector growth but private sector growth.

So far, if we take a look at what you did yesterday, there is no indication that you've learned your lesson. There is no acknowledgment that your five-point plan isn't working. There's every indication you're going to continue to tax, tax, tax and encourage more businesses to leave or see them go bankrupt. You aren't prepared to change the apprenticeship ratios. You are simply going to go ahead and continue with what you're doing and put this province, this once-great province, in greater jeopardy and in greater risk than it is today.

I would say to you, you need to learn what's meant by prudence and you need to recognize the harm that you've done to people in the province of Ontario. People are hurting today. People expected some answers today. They were looking for hope. You provided no hope for the family that you've now forced to pay, at some point in time, an additional \$6,500 as a result of the increased debt load that you've placed upon them. There was no hope for the small business person who is overburdened by red tape and by taxes. There's no hope for the large businesses that are trying to compete in the global economy; they have no advantage in this province whatsoever. And there's simply no hope for young people who are going to be graduating, looking for jobs. Well, the jobs aren't there; they're fleeing this province. So what you've done thus far has contributed only to the decline of this once-great province.

It's time for you to work with the opposition parties. It's time for you to work with all of the people in the province of Ontario. It's time for you to say more than, "Our five-point plan is working," because it's not. You had the chance to set up a select committee. We are in a time of crisis in this province. There are many people with great ideas, and it's time that this government and Premier McGuinty listened.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Bruce Crozier: Well, we've just been given quite a lesson by the member for Kitchener-Waterloo, but I have some information that might put some doubt in the minds of folks when we get advice from that particular party. First of all, she said that we're spending like drunken sailors. There's no evidence that there are any drunk sailors around; in fact, I think maybe some sailors would challenge that. I don't know why she's picking on sailors in particular, but that's for her to mention to them.

To know where you're going, you have to know where you've been. The advice given to us by the member from Kitchener-Waterloo—who in this House would you

think were the greatest deficit spenders in the history of the province of Ontario? The greatest deficits were run up by the NDP. From 1966 to 2008: I have 42 years of financial data here that was put together by the legislative library. The NDP, in their few years in office, ran up deficits that totalled \$47.7 billion. They tried to spend their way out of a recession that we had in the early 1990s. Then we go to the second-largest deficit spenders in the province's history and, lo and behold, that's the great Conservative Party. They have run up deficits, over the years, of \$43.6 billion. Now, that member from the Conservative Party was giving us advice on how to spend money? And by the way, while she was doing that, she said that we don't manage taxpayers' money well. Well, my goodness. It would seem to me that the great Conservative Party hasn't managed taxpayers' money very well. As a matter of fact, the Conservative Party that I remember since I've been here, the eight years of Conservative rule that I was here, I seem to recall that Mike Harris, the then-new Premier, started out by saying the province was bankrupt. That's the way he described the government that they assumed from the NDP. So do you know how he wanted to fix this bankrupt province?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: How?

Mr. Bruce Crozier: "How?" the member from Algoma-Manitoulin says. By giving people a tax cut and borrowing—borrowing—\$20 billion. Now, I don't know of a bankrupt company that would go out and borrow \$20 billion to give to their shareholders. I think that company would try and work its way out of that debt.

So we have this Conservative government prior to ours that's giving us the advice. They probably had eight years of the best economic growth in this country, and I will admit that. But what did they do? At the end of their reign, they leave a \$5.6-billion debt. Now, the previous speaker said, "You're just piling debt onto our children." Well, listen to yourselves. You piled debt onto our children.

0920

Then they'll say—and you know, I haven't been able to add it up, because it's just too much—"What you have to do is cut taxes." That's the secret to everything. We know Ronald Reagan had that secret; it was supposed to be trickle-down economics. We know George Bush has run his country into ruin that way. But anyway, that's what they say: tax cuts; that's the secret to it. We have ourselves targeted some tax cuts, some \$3 billion when they're fully implemented. It's somewhat near \$2 billion to this point. So we have had targeted tax cuts. But if you listen to them—and here's where I can't keep up with the numbers—day after day after day, they will stand up and want us to spend more money.

Just as an example, the speaker before started out by saying, "You're spending money like drunken sailors," and then turned right around and started to give us advice on areas where we would have to spend money. "Don't delay any spending. That will put our health at risk." It won't put our health at risk. We've got a good health system. We've got a health system that needs funding in

various areas, and when the time comes, it will get that funding.

That's the kind of advice we get from them over there: "Reduce taxes, cut spending, but, oh, wait, no—don't cut spending. I'm going to ask for more money." That's the rhetoric we get from the other side, time after time. You really should have taken some of your own advice. If you didn't, in the past, then you'd better be very cautious about how you give us advice for the future.

Let's see. This financial information I have: In 36 years, the Progressive Conservatives had seven balanced budgets. It's not much of a record to be giving advice to somebody else. The NDP, of course, in the recession of the early 1990s, went through five years where they didn't have a single balanced budget. How many have we had? We've had four balanced budgets out of nine. I don't think that's too bad a record, quite frankly. In fact, once we eliminated the \$5.6-billion deficit that was left to us by the Conservatives, why, we have had three balanced budgets.

Where are we today? Well, Finance Minister Duncan yesterday gave the fall economic update. In that update, we're looking at a possible half-billion-dollar deficit in the short term. Again, we get advice that we shouldn't look at deficits. Do you know what? I'm willing to bet that the federal finance minister is himself looking at the possibility of a deficit in Canada this year. I don't know why we should be criticized so strongly for having a possible deficit when the great Conservative Party that's leading Canada at the current time is even considering one themselves.

Let's be realistic, folks. We're in some very, very tough times. Ontario isn't in this alone, and you know, the people back in Essex who are suffering along with everybody else—in fact, some would say even more so in the Windsor-Essex area—understand that Ontario is not in this alone; they understand that we're in a world economic crisis right now. Governments all over this world—provincial, state and country—are going to have to take some measures and some steps that they've never had to take before.

You criticized our five-point plan, and that's your right. I was in opposition for 10 years and I know now that it's much easier to criticize than it is to govern, because there's no accountability in criticizing. You don't have to be concerned about what you say, because it really matters little.

When I say, "You don't have to worry what you say," let's see. We're speaking to the amendment to the amendment to the motion, I think, at the present time. So I will just go through some of the highlights of what it is that the third party's motion to our debate is. They want an industrial hydro rate so that Ontario's manufacturing and resource companies can count on stable competitive hydro policies. Well, that may be something that would appeal to certain sections of manufacturing in Ontario, but then, again, how do I explain to my constituents in Essex that the NDP wants them to pay higher hydro rates so that this particular policy might be implemented? I

think that might be kind of difficult to explain to my folks.

A jobs protection commissioner: Well, well. We have a Minister of International Trade and Investment; we have a Minister of Economic Development and Trade. I suspect that a trade commissioner could not do a great deal more than those two ministers, and in fact, I think, would do a great deal less.

A Buy Ontario policy: Well, the Minister of Government Services explained just a week or so ago that, essentially, what we have in the province of Ontario is a Buy Ontario policy.

Tougher plant closure legislation: I don't know what that means. I guess it means we have tough legislation now, but they want it tougher. The problem I see in that is that it may be unfriendly to business. In other words, depending on what they mean by tougher and to what extent they want to get tough, would that send a signal to companies—"Gee, we don't even think we want to go to Ontario, because we don't like that tougher plant closure legislation."

Pension and wage protection: I agree there. I think that hard-working employees shouldn't have the risk of losing their pensions and that they should have their wages protected. I don't know just how Mr. Miller, who is shouting out over there—Speaker, if I were shouting out like that, he would be asking—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. I just remind the honourable member that we refer to each other by our riding names.

Interjections.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: Thank you, Speaker.

Anyway, I guess they would want this either in addition to the five-point plan or to replace it. They have not said.

Then we'll go to the amendment to the motion and see what suggestions are contained in that. One is, "That the taxpayers of Ontario deserve an immediate and comprehensive financial statement...." Well, the public accounts were reported in September. That certainly is a comprehensive look at the spending of the province. The finance minister gave an economic update just yesterday. I think that that's an open and comprehensive look at what the state of our finances is. So I guess we're either taking their advice here or they are merely repeating what it is we do on a daily basis anyway.

0930

Even the next sentence says, "That people who have lost their jobs or are worried about their future deserve a comprehensive and realistic economic action plan designed to save existing jobs, attract new jobs and investment and help the unemployed find new work here in Ontario." I agree with that totally. The point is, you haven't said, in your suggestion, how you'd do it; we have. We have a five-point plan that addresses some of the very issues you mention in that particular sentence.

Let's look at the plan. Now that we've had advice from the biggest deficit spenders in the province's history and the second-biggest deficit spenders in the province's

history, let's look at what we're trying to do in these difficult economic times.

I mentioned earlier that we're cutting business taxes. Over time, to 2012, there will have been \$3 billion of cuts and rebates.

We've eliminated the capital tax for manufacturers and the resource sector. That was retroactive to January 2007, and that, so far, has meant \$190 million in rebates to business. We've cut the business education tax and accelerated that tax cut for northern businesses.

In the infrastructure spending area, we introduced a plan that over 10 years will put \$60 billion into building hospitals and schools. We were criticized a little earlier for jeopardizing the health care system. There are 100 hospital projects under way in the province of Ontario at the present time. I think that's pretty aggressive.

In just a matter of a week or two, we'll be going to the municipalities in the province with \$1.1 billion in stimulus for our economy. That translates into about 11,000 jobs.

There is the \$6.2-billion Building Canada fund that we participate in, there's a \$450-million municipal infrastructure program and there's been over \$700 million for colleges and university building projects.

Those are initiatives which stimulate the economy that we have been involved in over the several years we have had the privilege of being the government in the province of Ontario.

We're supporting innovation. The finance minister said yesterday that we are in transition, that we have an economy in Ontario that, when we come out of this slowdown, will perhaps not look exactly the way it did before. There are new businesses; there are areas of our economy that we will invest in that we haven't known before. We're having a greening economy; there are all kinds of opportunities. In fact the Premier, with a delegation of four other Premiers and a number of business people, is going to China with the idea of developing green industry. That's good.

They, over there, were criticizing that the top salesman in our province shouldn't be out getting new business. Well, if the economy is slowing, why wouldn't you go out and get new business? What's wrong with that?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: It's prudent.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: I think so. He's the top salesperson, and there are four other Premiers going. These folks would have him sit at home and not look for new opportunities in this world. That way, we're supporting innovation; we're putting funding into innovation.

We are partnering with business. Our auto strategy, which the federal government decided to get into way late in the game, by the way, has been working. It was only several days before the federal election that the federal government decided to come to the assistance of Ford Motor Co. in Windsor-Essex, and then it was with a loan. Now, they accepted that and it's going to save some jobs, but it followed the \$17 million we gave to Ford to begin to solve that problem in the first place. So the federal government was a little Johnny-come-lately when it came to that.

I guess, in conclusion, what I'm really saying is that it's rather rich for them—those folks over there—to give us advice. When they had that opportunity, they didn't even heed the advice that they are giving to us today. That's why I say it's a lot easier to sit there and criticize and then not really put anything concrete on the table—a concrete suggestion. It's easy to criticize, a little more difficult to govern, and that's what we're doing now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to join this debate here this morning. I'm going to have to take some time to correct the selective history that the member from Essex seems to have with regards to government here in Ontario, and in particular managing deficits in the province of Ontario. He seems to have this opinion about the previous Conservative government and how they had all of these deficits.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Yeah. They did.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yeah. Well, let's just tell the correct history. You see, when the Conservatives won election in 1995, it didn't follow a circumstantial deficit in the province, as you people inherited. It followed four consecutive deficits of \$10 billion or more—four consecutive deficits of \$10 billion or more. So what we had here was a serious structural deficit in the province of Ontario when the previous Conservative government took office. That was partly to blame on the failed government of Bob Rae, who now wants to be the Prime Minister of this country—heaven forbid that that should ever be the case. Part of the reason was Bob Rae's mismanagement and inability to handle a government when the economy was in difficult times. But it started with the previous government under David Peterson, who came into power under very similar circumstances that the McGuinty government came into power: in good economic times when the revenues were growing rapidly.

You people have done exactly what David Peterson did—live like the prodigal son. Do you know the biblical story of the prodigal son, where he wanted all of the inheritance, he wanted everything, so he could go out and spend it? That's exactly what David Peterson did, and that's what actually saddled Bob Rae and the New Democrats when they came into power in 1990. The mismanagement and the spending habits of the Peterson government saddled Bob Rae with a problem. Bob Rae didn't handle it very well because in the midst of a recession he still wanted to raise taxes. So he just drove more and more businesses out of the province of Ontario, which is exactly what this government wants to do today. It inherited a very sound economy in the province of Ontario. It inherited a province that had the ability to give the government very, very increased revenues over the five years that this government has been in power. In fact, it's increased the revenue at an unprecedented time. But unfortunately, it's increased spending at an even higher unprecedented rate.

The member from Essex talks about how opposition members want the government to spend on this and

spend on that. That is correct. It is our job to see where this government is deficient in its spending and bringing frontline services to the people of Ontario. The problem is that this government still spends; it just doesn't know how to spend. Like I said about that biblical story of the prodigal son, these guys get a hold of money and, as my dad used to say, it burns a hole in their pocket. They get a hold of the revenue from the taxpayers and the businesses and the corporations in this province, and it burns a hole in their pocket. They can't manage it. They see that cash and they have to spend it. That is why we've got such a problem in this province with regard to deficits—because they can't handle prosperity. When they get their hands on some money, they have to spend it on all kinds of programs that they think are good but do not bring benefit to the people of Ontario.

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They talk about having created jobs in this province. The only jobs they create are more government jobs. The government can't hire everybody. Governments don't create wealth; they simply take revenue and distribute it as expenditures. They don't create wealth. This government, this party, has the wrong-headed opinion that if they just keep hiring people at the government level, somehow Ontario's economy is going to continue to grow. The exact opposite is the truth. You have to create wealth by allowing business to create wealth. When you look at the \$96-billion budget that this government has, that's an unbelievable amount of money—almost a 50% increase since they took power—yet we're talking about a deficit today. But that \$96 billion pales in comparison to what the actual value of the Ontario economy is, which is somewhere up close to \$700 billion—because you allow the people who know how to make money and the people who know how to distribute wealth to do their job.

This government wants to hire everybody in Toronto to work in the bureaucracy. That doesn't work, because when the revenues do drop, you still have these spending commitments. This government has the spending commitments: They're committed to these workers. So now they're talking about, "Oh, we have a \$96-billion budget." That's \$96 billion, and this is their austerity plan: "We're going to cut about \$100 million." Can you imagine if a business was in trouble—and what is that in percentages? That's one tenth of 1% per cent, approximately, and this is the adjustment that you're going to make to spending in the province of Ontario, one tenth of 1%, because you guys don't know how to cut spending.

And what are you going to do? You're going to cut it on front-line services. You're going to cut it on the nurses we need in hospitals. Are you going to cut it from the bureaucracy? Are you going to cut it from the ministers' offices? Are you going to cut it from those people who are trading reports day by day to see how busy they are, wondering what they're writing about—a study on this and a study on that? The problem with this government who wants to do studies—you should be cutting some of those studies and putting money into

front-line services. That's what you should be doing in this province, but no, you choose to cut front-line services.

I was just going to ask myself—the former Minister of Health is here today; he would have had a hell of a time, a hell of a time—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. I just ask the honourable member to modify his language slightly.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Pardon me?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Modify your language slightly?

Mr. John Yakabuski: "Hell" is unparliamentary? Did that change while I was away?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Yes, I find it unparliamentary.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, I'm hopeful I don't go there, but anyway, if I do go there, I hope I don't go in a handbasket like this party wants to send this province.

Anyway, the former Minister of Health would have fought like heck to see those changes in front-line health care spending, but now, you see, he has a new gig. He's the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. Now he wants to just put everything on hold in the energy and infrastructure portfolio. He wants to wait until next year to even decide what we're going to do about power in this province, but I'm not going to talk about that today because I haven't got time, because there's so much to talk about in this economy.

Let's get back to this government that talks about the records of the past. They challenged and chastised the former Progressive Conservative government under Mike Harris, who took a real structural deficit and wrestled it to the ground, in spite of the fact that your Liberal cousins in Ottawa were trying to eliminate their deficit on the backs of provinces. Now, today this government talks about the federal government and how it's hurting the province. In the period from 1995 to 2003, did you ever hear this party once talk about or chastise or challenge the Chrétien Liberals for what they did to the provinces as a federal government? Did you ever hear the current Premier, Dalton McGuinty, challenge his party in Ottawa about what they did to the provinces? No. They only chastised and challenged the provincial government under Mike Harris as to what they were doing. They have the ability to criticize Conservatives, but when they were in opposition they couldn't even challenge the Liberal government that was in power in Ottawa, and there were real structural deficits in this province.

They talked about the deficit under the Conservative government here in its last year of power. Let's talk about that. A \$5.6-billion deficit is what Erik Peters came up with. However, \$2.9 billion of that could be directly related to the associated costs and the revenue reductions as a result of SARS and the blackout in the province of Ontario. You add \$771 million of health care transfers that had yet to come to the province but came to this government, and you find that we can deal with over \$4 billion of that deficit—over \$4 billion of a deficit at a

time when catastrophic things were happening in Ontario. Has this government ever once recognized or acknowledged the unusual and unprecedented challenges that faced the previous government that year? Not once. All they talk about is the \$5.6-billion deficit and claim that as financial mismanagement.

I'll tell you what financial mismanagement is: It's when you have a \$5.6-billion surplus, like this government had last year, and only a year later we're talking about a deficit, because, as I've said before, these people can't govern in tough times. They only want it when the piggy bank is full and they feel that their job and their just inheritance in this province is to come in and govern when the bank account is full, and spend all the money, because they're Liberals and that's what they love to do. It makes them happy when they go home at night and say, "Did you see what we spent?" They're either going to say, "You guys are asking us to spend money"—yes, we are, but we are asking you to spend money on the right things. You spend money on creating government jobs. The Premier talks about—

Interjection.

Mr. Paul Miller: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I believe that a previous speaker, the member from Essex, got up and was upset that I was making comments while he was speaking. Well, the member just did it to my colleague in the Conservative Party. Being a Deputy Speaker, he knows the rules. He reminded us how long he's been in the House. I'm relatively new to the House. He knows the rules, yet he breaks them when it suits him. I have a real problem with that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you for your comment. It's not a point of order. The honourable member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke has the floor, and I would ask all members to respect the fact that the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke has the floor.

Honourable member.

Mr. John Yakabuski: As I said, this government feels it's their ordained privilege to come into Ontario and spend money when Ontario has it. And now, when Ontario, like other jurisdictions, is finding money in scarce supply, they don't quite know how to handle it.

The Premier talks about his five-point plan—and we've talked about working in a non-partisan way to try to help bring Ontario out of this malaise that this government has taken it under. We're prepared to work with them. The Premier talks about his five-point plan. The five-point plan for business in this province under Dalton McGuinty—I would say he should retitile it: It should be called "layoff, refinance, restructure, close, and move to Saskatchewan." That's the five-point plan that we've got from this government, because they have offered nothing. They talk about a five-point plan, but what concrete and real proposals have they brought to business in this province since the downturn has hit? What new has been brought to business in this province to try to help turn around the economic situation? Absolutely nothing. They continue to stand in the way of business because they

would rather act as an impediment than a partner; they would rather burden businesses than work as a partner.

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I'm going to switch a little bit here to the one particular business that I'm concerned about in my riding: the forestry business. When I talk about how they would rather burden than partner, well, the forestry business has been suffering tough times ever since this government was elected, as a matter of fact. What is this government's approach to forestry? "Let's continue to bring in more and more new regulation and exert more and more burden on people who work in the business of harvesting forest products. Let's make it more difficult for them to operate and more difficult for them to compete in a globe market where the regulatory process and the regulatory burden on people from other jurisdictions is so much less than it is here in Ontario." That is one of the primary reasons that we are seeing shutdowns, closures, and layoffs in the forestry business.

Just last week, the Smurfit-Stone mill in Portage-du-Fort, Quebec, shut down. That's in the province of Quebec, but the reality is that the shutdown of the Smurfit-Stone pulp mill in Portage-du-Fort, Quebec, has more impact on the forestry business in Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke—my riding—than any business shutting down in the riding could, because that is the number one market for the pulp and chips that come out of the forest operators in Renfrew county. If you can't sell pulp, you can't sell logs. It's as simple as that. Your business, your forestry operations will shut down. You have to be able to get value out of every part of every tree in the forestry business today. It's no longer a business where you can simply high-grade things, take the best and leave the rest of it in the bush to rot; you've got to take everything. You've got to get money out of everything or you can't compete. It's akin to, if you're a beef farmer and you can't get somebody to buy the hamburger, I can assure you that you won't be able to sell your steak because it will be too expensive. You can't high-grade. The problem that the forestry industry is faced with when they lose a place to sell their pulp is that they shut down because nobody is going to buy their logs at the price that they would have to charge them to cover the cost of extraction when they can't get some money for the pulp.

We need this government—and I must say that I had the opportunity to speak to the Minister of Natural Resources yesterday, and I expect that she is going to stick to her commitment to try to find solutions to this. But I caution her and ask her and her government to stop standing as a barrier with its regulatory regime when it comes to the forestry industry, and start standing as a partner so that we can actually improve the situation that our forestry operators are working under here in the province of Ontario today. Of course, I speak more particularly about the forest operators in Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke who are under such stress as a result of the closure of Smurfit-Stone in Portage-du-Fort, Quebec.

Some of them have been able to find some temporary markets for some of those products, but they are, in fact,

very temporary. The closure of Smurfit-Stone could affect one out of every seven jobs in Renfrew county. That is huge. Can you imagine, if one out of seven jobs in the city of Toronto was threatened, what that would do to the economy of this city, of this province, of this country? That's what it could do in my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke. If this minister doesn't partner with the industry and try to work with them to find solutions to allow them to compete in a global market where, as a result of the regulatory burden foisted upon them by this government, they are simply not able to compete at this time.

The member for Essex talked about how we were questioning the government with regard to hydro rates. One of the things that the industries in this province will tell you is that one of the most difficult things for them to deal with is the high cost of electricity, and this government wants to continue to increase that cost to those manufacturers. Well, it's not rocket science. If your revenues are declining, as a business, and your expenses are increasing, it's just like a vise; it just keeps coming closer and closer and closer until there is no room anymore. It is the responsibility of the government to try to understand the reality of what it is like to do business in the province of Ontario. This government works in their own world, where they just kind of come up with these ideas about, "We'll figure out what's best for everybody, because we're Liberals and therefore we're smarter than everybody."

You need to sit down with the real business people in this province, the people who really make the economy work, the people who really create the jobs in this province, not the jobs you people try to pad your record with, saying there are this many more people working in the province of Ontario this month because you hired them all in Toronto to flip paper around in an office. No, you need to create real jobs by working with business in this province, and we are prepared to work with you. Don't shut out the opposition, as you've been doing so far. Let us work together to bring better times to the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde: C'est un grand plaisir pour moi de pouvoir participer à ce débat ce matin, sur une résolution déposée le 7 octobre dernier par notre premier ministre, Dalton McGuinty.

Since the tabling of the motion on October 7, a lot of changes have occurred in the markets, as we know. On October 7, the dollar was at 90.31 cents and oil was at \$90.27 a barrel. Today the dollar is at 79.2 cents and oil is at \$66.79. We recognize that the markets all over the world have taken a deep drop. But we have to remember something: Do we still have the market?

I hear people on the other side say that we should cut the corporate tax. I don't know if everyone here knows that we are the lowest in corporate tax in North America. At the present time, the current one is 31.5 with the federal government corporate tax. Ours is only at 12.9, I

believe, and within a 10-year period—the Premier announced it—we will eliminate the corporate tax. But I hear from the other side that we have to do something.

When I say the market isn't there, we look at our number one employer in Ontario. It's the auto parts and car industry. That industry employs over 132,000 people in Ontario, 75,000 of them in the parts industry. We do produce approximately 2.5 million cars a year, but in the parts industry, there are parts going back and forth to the States about six times. At the present time, we have to realize, when I say that the market isn't there in the States, that 80% of our product GDP is exported, and 93% of that goes to the States. But ever since this started in the States, we haven't got the market. Are we going to continue producing and sending everything to landfill sites? Definitely not.

Every level of government—the federal government, us and the municipal governments—has a job to do. But at the present time, our Premier has taken the initiative. As he was mentioning before, we could see that coming; I could see it coming. Way back six months ago, I produced a report; I could see those things coming. I keep saying that every one of us has a role to play.

In French we say, « On doit se regarder dans le miroir. » When I say that, qu'avons-nous fait pour garder nos emplois? Qu'avons-nous fait pour être plus compétitifs? Qu'avons-nous fait pour être capables de continuer à exporter notre produit aux États-Unis?

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On July 10, we decided to open up a marketing office in Paris. Why? Because we could see this coming. Our Premier could see it coming, and immediately he said we have to work towards that to face a big challenge that is coming to us, and we have done it. He has done it. How? By looking at the infrastructure program that we have in place today. We have a five-point plan, and we also started to look at the infrastructure. We know that the previous government downloaded a lot of services that the municipalities had to pay for. We know that in Glengarry–Prescott–Russell we had a shortfall with this downloading of over \$26 million a year. And when I hear my friends from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke saying that we should spend more money to be able to keep our jobs—how can we do it? We have to be competitive and we are not competitive at the present time.

When he referred to hydro rates, way back in 2002, I remember my good friend John Baird, who at that time was Minister of Energy. I met with him at the Royal York Hotel, I'll never forget that, and he said "Jean-Marc, I'm going to bring down the hydro rates to 4.3 cents and you can take the credit for it." I said "John, do we have the money for that?" "Oh yes, we have a surplus of over \$300 million a month." You know what that means to us? We took over with over \$18 billion of debt at Hydro. How? Because the people that had signed contracts with retail salespeople at 6.89 cents and 7.69 cents, we had to pay them back—the company. We were charging the customers 4.3 cents, as Premier Harris had done, and then those people who signed contracts at 7.69

cents and 7.89 cents, we had to give them the difference. This is why we ended up with this. To the point, no one in the world was ready to invest in the hydro industry in Ontario because at 4.3 cents they couldn't make a buck. Anybody who wants to invest money, it's because they want to make money, but they couldn't at 4.3 cents. At one point, we purchased the hydro that we were selling at 4.3 cents—we purchased the electricity at \$1.33 a kilowatt hour. Is that good administration? We purchased it at \$1.33 a kilowatt hour and we were selling it at 4.3 cents. Is this good administration? Not at all.

When I looked at the story on the auto industry from the CBC News on October 21, just three days ago, they were giving the whole story from 2005 about what's happening in the auto industry. I have the whole list here: 400 jobs lost at Magna; Toyota is cutting down production; in Renault, in France, they're cutting down the number of employees by 6,000 people; the auto industry in the States is down by 27%. You just have to look at the CBC News report. Just go on the Internet and you will see all that.

Just in 2008, BMW—you might say BMW is not a product that we do. Yes, we do products for BMW—parts here in Ontario. Mercedes is also affected. We produce windshields for Mercedes here in Ontario. On April 28, General Motors cut 3,500 jobs by scaling back shifts at four North American assembly plants. In Windsor, we're cutting 1,400 people; at General Motors in Oshawa, 2,600 people. So everything is there. We don't have the market anymore. Why? Because people are down from, let's say, \$50 an hour to probably making, today, \$10 an hour. Can they afford to buy a car? No. This is definitely affecting our market, so we have to be very careful.

Also what our Premier has done is, as I said, he took the initiative of looking at what is going to happen here in the next year or two. Immediately he says that we have to invest in the infrastructure program. Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke has received over \$10 million in one year from the McGuinty government. The Cambridge people that were criticizing yesterday, who said that we have gone on a spending spree—I cannot understand. Are we going to go back and tell the people in Cambridge, "Should we take back the money from you people? According to your MPP, it shouldn't have been spent." They got \$9,086,000. When I look at Halton Hills and Halton region, do you know how much they got? You got \$32 million. Are you going to criticize the McGuinty government for looking after the infrastructure that the previous government hadn't done a thing about? This is why today all the municipalities are trying to get money to fix up the water mains, the sewage system, the roads and bridges, but we said, "If we put this program in place, that will create 11,000 jobs." Instead of having those people that don't have a job probably going back from \$30 an hour to \$10 an hour, today the construction industry is becoming the number one industry.

In Ontario, the industrial sector is employing 950,000 people and, again, 93% of our exports are to the States. As I said, we have to be competitive. We have to look at every angle that we could look at.

C'est pour ça que nous devons tous regarder dans le miroir : « Est-ce que j'ai vraiment fait ma part? Est-ce que je suis prêt à accepter de conserver mon emploi? »

When I look at what our Premier has done—we have some problems in the town of Alexandria in North Gengarry. I went up to see the Premier and the Minister of Economic Development and Trade at the time, and I said that to save companies like Alexandria Moulding and Altec we have to come up with some changes within the municipality. They need some money to save those jobs. They were looking at transferring only the shipping sector—the distribution sector—to the States. That would have meant about 135 people, plus the trucking companies, plus the mechanics for those companies. That is not counting the indirect jobs.

But I sat down with them, and I got the union to sit down with me and the employees. We looked at every angle. They were saying that in the States the electricity was cheaper. I analyzed everything and I turned around and said, “Even though they're giving you municipal tax free for the next five years, you still pay more in the States when you calculate everything.” We needed something. We needed to change the water mains to make sure that they were able to get instruments in their plants so the sprinklers would work, because in the system they have in place the pressure was not strong enough. And we said to the union, “What can you do to save those jobs?” Alexandria is only a small town of 3,400 people in the east end of my riding. We looked at it. We gave them \$3.65 million to fix up the water main. We did save the jobs, but with the good part, the good role, that the union has played. They looked at it. Their average salary was probably only \$23 an hour; it's better than \$10 an hour. If they had been laid off, they would have probably made \$8 or \$10 an hour over there. We saved those jobs. The union said, “Yes, we'll reopen the collective agreement. We will cut down the salary by 90 cents an hour. There won't be any more bonuses if you want to keep the jobs here.”

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The 135 jobs meant, at the end, 534 jobs, because that was the first section of Alexandria Moulding. Altec, a Cleveland company that is down there too—probably only 60 people. We sat down with them. I remember being at a council meeting, and I asked the mayor, “Can I use your kitchen to meet those people before they make the decision on moving out?” I sat down with them in the kitchen, and they said, “Yes, Mr. Lalonde, you are our MPP. We depend on you.” So I went back over here, and we negotiated. Today, they are expanding. Alexandria Moulding is about five times bigger than it was at the time that we negotiated that. That is number one.

When I look at all the services or the money that we have given to the municipalities—unbelievable. When I look at the city of Ottawa, for example—we have a member from Nepean here who criticizes us quite often, let me tell you—they got \$111 million from the two programs that we have in place. Is that because—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: They're doing their job. What's the point?

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: What's the point? It's because the infrastructure has to be fixed up, so we did it.

There are a lot of points that we could discuss. Like my colleague from Essex said, we look to help out the small business people.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Sure you do.

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Yes.

I have the figures here, which I couldn't believe; I have the charts. Surprisingly enough, I never heard the member from Leeds–Grenville criticizing the provincial business industrial education property tax for \$500,000. In Parry Sound, industrial, it was \$4,770 per 500; in Brockville, it was \$22,170, a difference of \$18,000 per 500. That was done by the previous government. The downloading wasn't fair for everyone. Today, what we have done—the Premier says, “We want to level this off across the province, so we will invest \$750 million to make sure that everybody gets the same level of services in Ontario.”

In Cornwall, \$21,187—444% more than what they are paying in Parry Sound.

Interjection: Shame.

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Shame, yes, you could say that.

There are a lot of points that we could discuss here, but let me tell you that the McGuinty government has taken the initiative. Just last Friday, I was in Montreal, for example. There was a forum on the economy, and the chief economist from the National Bank of Canada made a presentation—and the same thing for France, African countries. I was happy to be there to represent our minister.

Let me tell you what the chief economist, Mr. Clément Gignac, said: “To face the challenge that we have, one thing that everyone has to do is invest in the infrastructure.” Was I ever glad when I heard that from Mr. Gignac, the chief economist. I said, “This is exactly what the Premier has done in Ontario.” If the federal government had done the same thing, we could have saved a lot of employment. As I said, our program has created over 11,000 jobs. But when we announced on August 25 that we had \$1.1 billion for the infrastructure program for our municipalities, the federal government, the day after—the member for Nepean, who was Minister of the Environment, was proud to say we got \$6.2 billion for the province of Ontario over a period of six years. But do you know how much we got for this year? We got \$100 million for over 400 municipalities. That's peanuts. It's a shame. And to get that \$100 million, the municipalities have to match it. Prior to the last federal campaign we had, we had the member going around announcing \$2.6 million to Hawkesbury, \$600,000 to Bourget, but there was no program, so they never got the money. That was the political role they were playing.

But this is great—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. It being just past 10:15, the debate is adjourned.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): This House stands recessed till 10:30.

The House recessed from 1016 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I'd like to introduce the parents of Andrew Walker, the page from Scarborough-Rouge River: Jennifer and Bob Walker, and they're with us in the east gallery today.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I'd like to welcome the grade 5 students from St. Bernard Catholic church in my riding of York South-Weston, who are here today visiting the Legislature.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'd like to welcome members of the Tibetan community and members of Students for a Free Tibet here today.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to introduce my wife, Carole Paikin-Miller, in the west gallery.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I trust the member will be on his best behaviour today, with his wife present.

Mr. Charles Sousa: I'd like to welcome to Queen's Park two young Australian professionals, part of a Rotary International exchange team hosted by the Rotarians of Mississauga: Pieter Kool and Jack Smith.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is for the Premier and it deals with yesterday's economic statement. I think one word that summarizes that statement, Premier, is "disappointing." People have been looking for leadership and inspiration and hope, and I think they were let down.

Two hundred and thirty thousand jobs have been lost in this province in the past two years. Communities like Goderich, Smiths Falls, Chatham and many others are facing economic uncertainty. They heard nothing to indicate a recognition of their challenges in yesterday's statement.

Premier, why was your economic statement silent on the impact that job losses are having on so many communities and so many families in this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's been said that a budget or an economic update is more than just a financial statement. It's a statement of our values. What we worked hard to do is to ensure that statement is informed by Ontarians' values.

It is with some regret that we've got to come to grips with a global economic challenge, but our resolve is stronger than ever to do what Ontarians are asking us to do. They want us to protect their public services. They want us to protect their schools and their hospitals and other public protections, to make sure we're continuing

to fund police on our streets, for example. So we won't shy away from that. But at the same time, we want to take into account the fact of our economic reality. The economy is going to grow more slowly and we're going to have to make some more difficult decisions. We have made some that will help us get to this year-end but there are more to come. We will always do that, in keeping with Ontario values.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Again, more rhetoric from the Premier. In the statement yesterday, his government was still suggesting that their five-point plan is working, as jobs bleed out of this province and families are suffering. The five-point plan clearly isn't working, and you can't seem to recognize and accept that.

Premier, if you want to stop the erosion of jobs and help struggling communities and families in this province, why didn't you announce tax cuts that businesses have asked for? Why didn't you announce a frontal assault on red tape that businesses have asked for? Why didn't you address these critical issues in your economic statement yesterday?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: From time to time, we come to stare into the face of the Conservative ideology. They're unhappy with the results of our decisions. We're going to have a modest deficit. We've chosen to do that rather than gut public services. They're saying that they're unhappy with the deficit, that we shouldn't have a deficit, but they're also saying that we should cut taxes dramatically. You can't have it both ways. You can't maintain public services and dramatically cut. We had that experience. They cut their taxes and they left us with deficits. We've had that experience. They were in power for eight years and they ran five deficits.

We've tried that; we're not going back there. We're going to look after public services, we're going to run a modest deficit and we're going to bring reality to bear when—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Premier. Final supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: The Premier talks about our suggestions in terms of improving the situation for communities, families and people looking for work as "Conservative ideology." I guess he wasn't talking to his Liberal counterpart Gordon Campbell yesterday, who made an economic statement announcing tax cuts for families and businesses. Here, we get nothing but more rhetoric from this Premier. We know communities, families, seniors and businesses in this province are facing real challenges, yet they saw no relief from you in yesterday's statement, no relief from 20% increases in property tax assessments and no relief from 10% increases in hydro rates.

The Premier is living in a bubble in his taxpayer-funded Toronto accommodation. There's no recognition of reality in the failings of his five-point plan. Premier, when can the people of this province expect some real action to address real problems?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: At the beginning of my honourable colleague's last question, he talked about BC.

They have different circumstances there. They have a different makeup to their economy, and they introduced a new tax just a short time ago. I don't think that's what my friend is suggesting that we should do here.

With respect to our five-point plan, let me tell you about some of the things that we've been able to accomplish through that plan. We've got 100,000 more young people now in our colleges and universities. We have 100,000 people working in jobs today as a result of infrastructure projects totalling more than 100 in number. We've invested dramatically in innovation, turning home-grown ideas into hometown jobs. Those are the kinds of things that take some time, they take some perseverance and they take some continuing application.

We've made some real progress in that regard. We will continue to make progress together, working with Ontarians.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Back to the Premier: This morning on CFRB radio, he described the province's economy as a train wreck. Well, guess who was driving the train? Not only has this government ignored hard-hit Ontarians, but you're not being straight with them about why you won't help.

In response to repeated questions and requests that we've made over the past few weeks for a full accounting, we were told that all would be revealed in yesterday's statement. Today, we're still waiting. Premier, where is the detailed breakdown of the \$1 billion in savings, which is now listed as a \$1.1-billion figure in the statement? That's what you promised. Where is it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The background documents that were detailed yesterday, as well as the online sites, outline in great detail where those changes are happening. But let me tell you what we won't do as we confront the challenges in our economy. We won't fire 6,200 nurses, the way you did while you were doing tax cuts, or 15,000 teachers. We won't let meat inspectors go; we won't let water inspectors go; we won't cut 1,400 people from the Ministry of the Environment staff.

I noted with great interest what Conservative economist Diane Francis said last evening to your colleague Mr. Hudak—that this modest deficit is the right approach to go. We're taking a balanced, fulsome approach to the challenges in the economy. We reject their tax cuts—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I asked the Premier a specific question, and we get the Minister of Finance puffing out his chest, as he's wont to do, and more and more blarney, instead of addressing a specific issue and a specific concern.

This is a government that has already overspent its budget by millions of dollars, while it's asking Ontarians to tighten their belts. Ontarians can have no confidence

that this so-called billion dollars in savings is anything more than creative accounting.

Once again, Premier and your minister, will you confirm that this year's deficit will in fact be \$1.6 billion? Is that what next spring's budget will reveal?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We outlined that our view, based on current projections, is the deficit will be \$500 million.

I'll tell you what's blarney: trying to suggest, as they did five years ago, that they had a balanced budget when they left a deficit of \$5.5 billion. I'll tell you what's blarney: trying to imply that our five-point plan isn't working—the infrastructure money is in the ground, creating 100,000 jobs. I'll tell you what's blarney: standing at your seat and criticizing us for not doing business tax cuts, when we've done \$3 billion and you voted against every one of them. I'll tell you what else is blarney: It's blarney to suggest that our valuable investments in public services, education, health care, environment and infrastructure—those jobs give people paycheques, and those people spend their cheques and their money in grocery stores, in restaurants.

We've laid out the right plan in difficult times, and we reject your failed ideology which is being—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: "Blarney" wouldn't be an adequate word to describe that load of you know what.

Perhaps the Premier and his colleague are being dismissive about the real amount of the deficit because, really, it's not their debt; it's a debt of almost \$20,000 that he's passed on to every single household in Ontario. That's a debt that's going to have to be paid by our kids and our grandkids going forward, through increased taxes. It's a debt they wouldn't have to pay if this government knew how to set aside a rainy day fund, because they've had \$27 billion in increased revenue over the life of this government. It's a debt they wouldn't have to pay if the Attorney General and the Minister of Education didn't spend \$7 million on hotels last year, if you didn't have a \$2.3-million party in Windsor just a few weeks ago.

Premier, Minister, Ontarians deserve to know why they should have—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I'd like to remind the House that when the Canadian dollar was weak relative to the US, when the US economy was running on all eight cylinders, when oil prices were down around \$20 to \$30, that member and his party ran five deficits. In the last four years of their administration, expenses went up more than 10%, while revenues went up 5%. Their expenditures grew faster than their revenues.

The debt-to-GDP ratio has gone from 25% when we took office to 17% this year, because in addition to making these sound and prudent investments in our schools, in our hospitals, we've been paying down debt. We've been investing in infrastructure. We will continue to make those prudent investments.

Again, I say, we reject the one-trick pony of tax cuts and deregulation that's in disrepute today right around the world.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Sorry to interrupt, but I didn't see the individual here earlier. Join me in welcoming the member for Markham from the 34th and 35th Parliaments and the member for York from the 32nd and 33rd Parliaments, Mr. Don Cousens. Welcome back to Queen's Park.

New question. The member from Toronto-Danforth.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Peter Tabuns: To the Premier: Yesterday's economic statement demonstrates that this government has no plan to deal with the economic crisis. Ontarians are asking one simple thing: Will you be there for them at a time of unprecedented economic insecurity? You didn't introduce a single new measure to respond to the economic crisis. The government gave a very simple response: "You are on your own when you need us the most."

Will you admit that in yesterday's economic statement, this government failed to announce a single new measure to create jobs? This government has absolutely no idea what to do about Ontario's economic crisis.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question from my honourable colleague, but obviously I take issue with the question itself.

The Conservatives are asking us to dramatically reduce taxes, which would lead to a gutting of our public services. I want to say to my honourable colleague: We've said no to that. We're standing up for public services in Ontario. We're standing up for maintaining the health and vigour and vitality of our schools, our health care and our protections for the public in general. We're standing up for that. That's what we said yesterday through our fall economic statement.

At the same time, we said that we can't be blind to economic realities, and we need to find ways to demonstrate restraint. That's why we found an additional \$500 million in savings for this year-end—not an easy thing to do, because the year is mostly over. So I would disagree with my friend. We have said yes to public services, we've said yes to restraint, and we rejected suggestions that come from the extremes.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Premier, you had a choice yesterday. You could have announced bold new jobs initiatives; you could have looked at the levers that are in use in Manitoba and Quebec, where they're standing up for their populations; you could have taken on the responsibility of looking after Ontarians in difficult economic times. Why won't you take the tools that are in use in Quebec and Manitoba and are being used to protect working people and use those here in Ontario to

show people that you're on their side and are not saying to them simply, "You're on your own"?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, we see things differently. Over on this side of the House we've been working hard to help Ontarians to grow stronger—and manufacturing in particular. That's what our five-point plan is all about. When you invest dramatically, as we have, in post-secondary education, for example, creating more opportunities for more Ontarians to take advantage of upgrading themselves and retraining themselves, that's a good thing for those individuals and it's a good thing for the economy. When you invest dramatically in infrastructure, as we have—we've got over 100 construction projects under way, over 100,000 jobs that we're creating at present. That's all about helping people right now and creating jobs right now. Ontarians sense that. They're actually experiencing that. Again, I disagree with my friend.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Notwithstanding what the Premier has cited, the simple reality is that people are losing their jobs, are losing their incomes and are facing desperate times, and you are saying to them, "You're on your own." Now is the wrong time for government to retreat. Now is the time for government to step in and protect the population of this province. Will you not stand in your place, admit you don't have a plan to deal with this economic crisis, and will you, in fact, rethink your position, come back to Ontarians and tell them they're not on their own?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: While we come to grips with this global economic challenge and the consequences being felt here in Ontario, I don't want us to lose perspective. Since 2003, we've created a net 500,000-plus jobs. In the last year alone, we've created 104,000 net new jobs in the province of Ontario. We're creating one third of all new jobs in Canada. Unemployment is down today in comparison to when the Tories finished up their time in government. Wages, in fact, are up. This year, 83% of all the new jobs created in Ontario were created in the private sector. So there is some good news out there, and we shouldn't lose perspective.

There is no better place on this planet in which to seek shelter from this global economic storm than here in Canada. We're part of that. We're making some difficult decisions, but I argue that they are the responsible decisions.

TRANSFER PAYMENTS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Tell that to people in Windsor.

To the Premier: Yesterday's economic statement was a failure that will be felt hardest by the province's cash-strapped municipalities. The government is now in deficit, so its Investing in Ontario Act won't provide new infrastructure money this year. Municipalities are taking it on the chin. The economic downturn is forcing them to spend more on downloaded social services and they'll be

getting much less for crumbling infrastructure. How much longer will you leave municipalities in an untenable position?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Hon. Jim Watson: Let me just correct the record. This government, through the Premier at the AMO conference in August, announced that we are investing \$1.1 billion from the Investing in Ontario Act. We had a choice when that piece of legislation was passed; that money could have gone to a wide variety of partners, but this government showed its commitment to the municipal sector and provided those surplus funds of \$1.1 billion. They will be in the hands of the municipal sector to create jobs, to build infrastructure, within the next two to three weeks, and it's something we're very proud of.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Yesterday's statement fails municipalities. Two years after the provincial-municipal fiscal review, this government still has nothing to show for it. The economic downturn is going to hit all communities. Municipalities that are in the resource heartland have been hit hard. That will spread. Those costs for Ontario works will stay on the backs of municipal property taxpayers. Will the Premier admit that by not making an immediate down payment on provincially mandated services and not committing to assuming full responsibility for Ontario works by fall 2011, that sends the wrong message and fails municipalities?

Hon. Jim Watson: I hate to correct the member for a second time, but the fact of the matter is that in 2003, the municipal sector received approximately \$1.1 billion in transfer payments from the Ontario government. Today, in 2008, \$2.2 billion is going to the municipal sector: That's a doubling of funding that's gone from the province of Ontario to those municipalities. Let me just quote mayor David Miller, who said, "What the funding announcement will do for the city of Toronto for the first time since amalgamation is give us a viable operating budget before the budget process starts ... we're extremely pleased with the provincial economic statement." That was David Miller, December 2007. We're proud of the partnership we've developed with the municipal sector. We're not going down the route the NDP went down with social contracts, with meddling in the collective agreement—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Not only did that statement fail municipalities, it failed the health care system. In 2007, the government promised to hire 9,000 additional nurses. Ontarians are told to wait. "Wait," is what the Premier is telling Ontarians in terms of delivering on his promises. "Wait," is what he's telling people in emergency rooms and in their hospital beds. How will the Premier explain this broken promise?

Hon. Jim Watson: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. David Caplan: In fact, what's happened in the past five years is an over-\$11-billion increase in health

care spending—a 37% increase. That has funded 8,000 new full-time nurses in our hospitals, in our long-term-care homes. In fact, my predecessor—a brand new and insightful, exciting program to provide off-load nurses into emergency rooms to be able to handle some of those pressures. I'm very proud of the work we've accomplished in reducing wait times, and I'd like to share with the member some of the results of those investments: angiography, down 53%; angioplasty, down 50%; cataract surgery, down 63%; hip replacement, down 52%; knee replacement, down 51%; CT scans, down 46%; cancer surgeries, down 19%; MRI scans, down 18%, bypass surgeries, a 26%—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I would point out to the Minister of Finance that our government went from an \$11.3-billion deficit in 1995 and ended our career with five consecutive balanced budgets. Not four: five.

My question is to the Premier. Ontario, once the point of destination for global business, is now a point of departure. Companies are leaving at an incredible rate, taking jobs and capital with them, but also they're taking away tax revenue, forcing Ontario into deficit. Premier, I warned you about this many times. If you tax them too much, they will leave. Your total revenues will shrink. If you offer a competitive jurisdiction, more businesses will come and revenues will increase. It's called the Laffer curve. It's basic economics. Premier, will you reduce your tax rates, your corporate—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I remind my colleague opposite that not only did they run consecutive deficits, they borrowed money to cut taxes. They raised the province's debt. They left us with a \$5.5-billion deficit. We were able to deal with that and delivered three consecutive surplus budgets. We have paid down the province's debt. We have rehired the environment inspectors you fired, the meat inspectors you fired, the nurses you fired.

The tax-cut, deregulation, slash-and-burn ideology has been rejected around the world. Even Mr. Flaherty today acknowledges that a deficit could in fact be a reality for Canada and may in fact be a prudent and appropriate policy. I'd welcome the member to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: That's exactly the attitude that has put us in a deficit. The current deficit is largely because almost \$900 million less revenue has been received from Ontario corporate taxes. Where did the money go? It went to Mexico, it went to China, Brazil, to states like Pennsylvania, where the costs are lower than they are in Ontario. Businesses like Volvo, John Deere,

Henniges Automotive, Interforest, PPG, General Motors and Campbell Soup haven't gone out of business. They've simply moved out of Ontario and consolidated elsewhere, taking their tax dollars and tax revenues with them.

Minister, I ask you again, will you learn from your mistakes? Will you save Ontario jobs? Will you safeguard essential services and implement a comprehensive shift in economic policy that includes making corporations more competitive in Ontario?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We did that in our throne speech and in our budget. We have introduced the largest infrastructure spending initiative in the province's history, and that member voted against it. We've provided \$1.5 billion for skills training and training initiatives. That member voted against it. We eliminated the capital tax for manufacturers. We are equalizing and reducing the business education tax right across Ontario. That member and his party voted against it. We are building partnerships with our municipalities by increasing funding, by uploading ODB, ODSP. That member voted against it.

That ideology has been discredited around the world. We will continue—

Interjection.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: —and we won't do a carbon tax, like you're advocating, I say to the member opposite. What I'll say—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question?

POVERTY

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is for the Premier. Yesterday neither the finance minister's economic statement nor the background papers mentioned the word "poverty" once. Ontarians can only conclude one thing and that is that poverty obviously has fallen off the government's radar. At a time when more people are falling into poverty every day, there was nothing in the government's economic statement to assuage the fears of the poor—no plan, no strategy, nothing.

Why are the McGuinty Liberals choosing to ride out the economic storm on the backs of Ontario's most vulnerable citizens?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think it's important that we take a step back and look at some of the things that we are already doing, that we will continue to do to support people living in poverty in this province. Let's talk for a minute about the Ontario child benefit that you voted against. The Ontario child benefit is now putting money in the hands of families of low income in this province. That money has flowed, it's going monthly, and we have a scheduled plan to increase the amount until it reaches \$1,100 per child per year.

The minimum wage has gone up from \$6.85 to \$8.75. It's going up to \$9.50 next March. There is absolutely no

plan to change that. Social assistance rates have gone up and continue to go up. Affordable housing: \$100 million in our last budget that you voted against to repair the infrastructure.

We are making great progress—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: The honourable minister speaks of the Ontario child benefit and all the other things as if they're actually doing something. They amount to about a dollar a day and that's all that you have done in your term in government.

The government repeated yesterday that it would "delay" or "slow down" the implementation of some new spending initiatives; those are your words, not mine. After one year, not one red cent has been put forward for a dental program for low-income people. Can the Premier promise Ontarians that no poverty initiative—for instance, the low-income dental plan in the 2008 budget—will be delayed or cut?

1100

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We are at a really interesting moment in Ontario's history when we have a government that is committed to actually tackling poverty. We're committed to measuring poverty, we're committed to making progress.

As the member opposite well knows, we are on track to release our poverty reduction strategy by the end of the year. That hasn't changed. We're full steam ahead. We are going to make the changes we need to make so that every child in this province has the opportunity to be the very, very best they can be.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Transportation, Minister, affects every single resident of Ontario, whether it's driving, catching a bus or taking a plane. This is an area government cannot neglect. Not only does a sound transportation system ensure the smooth flow of goods, it also ensures that Ontarians are able to get from point A to point B as quickly and safely as possible.

In my riding of Northumberland—Quinte West, we have three public transit systems: Port Hope, Cobourg, and the city of Quinte West is just embarking on one. I'm hoping the minister can share with the House and with all Ontarians what his ministry is doing to ensure that the importance of a solid, well-funded transportation system is understood here in Ontario.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'd like to thank the member for Northumberland for his excellent question. He's also from Quinte West, I might add.

The emphasis we have on transportation has recently been recognized in a Fraser Institute study, which states as follows: "Ontario has the best transportation system in all of Canada." The study shows that Ontario received the highest overall rating in the country for passenger transportation modes. The study looked at highway

systems, transit systems, and air and marine transportation, an assessment that followed a detailed and thorough analysis of the wide range of transportation factors.

The government agrees with the study's lead author, who says a province's transportation system is a critical factor in fostering a positive investment climate and facilitating economic growth and prosperity. I will, in the supplementary, indicate some of the things that we've been doing, if I get that question.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I'm pleased to hear that our great province has been recognized by the Fraser Institute to have the best transportation system in Canada, although I must admit I'm not surprised.

It is my understanding that since 2003, the McGuinty government has invested over \$1.5 billion for transit, highway infrastructure, and municipal roads and bridges in eastern Ontario alone. Ridings across the east have benefited from these investments, including my riding. I'm hoping the Minister of Transportation is able to share with this House details of those investments.

Hon. James J. Bradley: We are investing, as the member would know, record amounts in transportation, and there are benefits. For example, the \$17.5-billion Move Ontario 2020 initiative will not only bring 156,000 jobs to Ontario, but it will also see \$14.5 billion, or 82% of the total dollar amount, at a minimum spent in Canada. This money will be spent on engineering, design construction and rolling stock.

This is why we continue to invest in transportation in this province. We delivered on our commitment to provide 2 cents per litre of provincial gas tax revenues to municipalities as a source of long-term sustainable funding for public transit. At the Association of Municipalities of Ontario conference in Ottawa, Premier McGuinty announced a \$1.1-billion investment in municipal infrastructure under the Investing in Ontario Act. In 2006, \$1.2 billion—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question?

NURSES

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is to the Premier. Premier, there was shock in health care circles yesterday when, at a time when we have a growing and an aging population and at a time when we have a serious shortage of doctors and nurses, you chose to cut health care on the backs of patients. I'm asking you, why are you not hiring the 9,000 nurses that you promised patients?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I note that we're into the last half of question period, so now the spend questions kick in. The first half was all about cutting taxes, with the logical consequence of that being gutting public services, but now they're asking us to spend more. The reality is that we've been proud to hire on 8,000 more nurses. We're looking forward to hiring more, but we can't do it

as quickly as we originally planned. That's all we've said. I think that's a very responsible approach to dealing with new investments. We're going to first and foremost protect existing programs. We have to be very careful about taking on new financial responsibilities. So we said to our nurses that we won't be able to hire them as quickly as we'd originally planned. Again, I think that's responsible.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Well, it's unbelievable that here we have a Premier who said there would be no more increases in taxes and the first thing you did was to impose a health tax on Ontarians. You've taken \$12.2 billion out of their pockets and now your priority is to cut health care funding and reduce front-line services. Do you not realize that nurses are the backbone of the health system? We're reading today that it's going to have an impact on further overcrowding in emergency rooms. Long-term-care homes can't hire enough nurses right now. You are putting patient health and safety at risk by the decision that you have made. Are you prepared to put patient lives and safety at risk?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Just by way of review, I think it is helpful if we take a look at what happened to nurses in Ontario in the last several years. Under the NDP, the number of registered nurses in Ontario fell by 3,000. Under the Conservatives, they fired 6,200. We've created 8,000 new nursing jobs. The percentage of nurses working full-time fell by 3% under the NDP, to 50.8%. They've now increased by more than 10% on our watch, and for the first time in the history of Canada we have a guarantee—a job guarantee—for nurses graduating in the province of Ontario, one of the very few jurisdictions in the world. That's what we think of our nurses: We've got more of them working full-time, and we have a job guarantee in place.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: We hired 12,000 nurses.

Hon. David Caplan: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: According to the College of Nurses, they fired 6,200 nurses.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): That's not a point of order.

The member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: Here comes the nice guy.

To the Minister of Community and Social Services. On October 7, the minister acknowledged new written rules for the temporary care assistance program which now deny financial support to thousands of grandparents raising their grandkids. On October 16, the minister attempted to rewrite history, claiming there was never a directive on rule changes. There's no argument that there was a rule change. To help the minister understand this, on Monday I gave her a copy of the new written rules. Now that she has had ample time to personally review them, can she finally explain why her ministry changed

the rules to ensure that all grandparents raising their at-risk grandkids will not be cut off from temporary assistance?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I know that the member of the third party is very interested about this question. I just want to let him know that in 2003 and 2004 there was a monthly average of 4,332 children for which grandparents were receiving temporary care assistance. In 2007 and 2008 there are 5,195 children. Our budget went from \$11 million to almost \$13 million last year. So we are increasing. I can guarantee that every grandparent or adult—because it's not only for grandparents; other adults are taking care on a temporary basis—if they are eligible, will continue to receive temporary assistance.

1110

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Paul Miller: I don't know what that question was answered by; I'm not sure. I was shocked that the minister hasn't even bothered to understand her own policy, especially a policy that affects so many vulnerable grandparents and grandkids.

Yesterday, the minister stated that a grandparent raising two grandkids can receive up to \$1,000 a month. Grandparents from each corner of this province are saying, "Show me the money." Erlene Weaver from Hamilton, a grandmother of three, used to receive a total of \$562 a month for three kids in temporary care assistance; now she receives nothing. Why? Minister, remember that most of these grandparents do not qualify for your other programs, so please tell us how they can get this \$1,000 a month—and, Minister, don't tell them to go on welfare.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: This program, temporary care assistance, is not income-tested. This member would like to have this program income-tested. When I review it, if it was income-tested, 75% of the grandparents would not receive this temporary care assistance. You review it—we're not going to do it, and we're not going to follow the member's advice.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the member from Hamilton East to withdraw his comment, please.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'll withdraw the lie part. She's not telling the truth.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the member again to withdraw the comment.

Mr. Paul Miller: This is unacceptable. This is total nonsense.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Withdraw the comment.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'm sorry; she's not telling the truth. I cannot withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Will you withdraw?

Mr. Paul Miller: No, I won't.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I will have to then name the member Paul Miller from the riding of Hamilton East.

Mr. Paul Miller was escorted from the chamber.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: My question is for the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. Minister, last Thursday, EPCOR announced that the company would not go forward with the second phase of the Kingsbridge wind farm near Goderich in my riding. This is certainly disappointing news for my community. My constituents believe in the importance of renewable energy, and we have three wind farms in that area alone. Kingsbridge 1 and Ripley wind farm are both in operation, and Enbridge A and B, with a total of a 182-megawatt capacity, is under construction and is expected to go online in the next few weeks.

We are concerned. Would the minister tell us what EPCOR's announcement means for our province's commitment to increasing renewable energy?

Hon. George Smitherman: Firstly, I want to say, with respect to EPCOR's decision, that we share the disappointment, and we're very, very determined to learn all lessons which are available from it. The good news, in a sense, I suppose, is that they had had success with a 40-megawatt project earlier, and 16 of the 19 big projects related to RFPs are under construction or online.

In the next few weeks, Ontario will experience three big, new wind projects coming online in the riding of Dufferin—Caledon: Melancthon II, with 132 megawatts; Kruger Energy's project in Chatham-Kent comes online soon, with 101 kilowatts; and in the very member's riding, as she mentioned, Enbridge Ontario A and B, with 182 megawatts. Contrast that with just a few years ago: we had 15 megawatts; today, we have 531, and by the end of the year, we'll be up to 950 megawatts.

We think that we can do more, and that's why the changes that I've asked for in the integrated power system plan will influence even more greatly Ontario's desire for renewable energy.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I am very supportive of renewable energy projects, and I think it's very important that we move towards more renewable energy. It must be a part of the energy supply mix, and these changes will contribute to cleaner air and also support our local economy. However, one of the reasons that EPCOR used to explain why their second phase did not go through was a delay in municipal and provincial approvals.

We need the minister to tell us what he is going to do in order to help companies overcome potential problems like these.

Hon. George Smitherman: As I mentioned in my earlier answer, we recognize that EPCOR had some very distinct criticisms of the way the process worked, and we take those to heart. We've made good progress for sure. We've gone from 15 megawatts to 530 in a few years, and we're going to add almost 400 more megawatts by the end of this year. But we know that we can do better. I'm going to be working very closely with government ministries—municipal affairs and environment—to see

what enhancements we can bring, and also with the various energy agencies.

I think that good progress is reflected in the OEB's support for the transmission improvement from Bruce to Milton. That's very, very necessary. We'll certainly unlock more of the best wind potential that we have in the whole province of Ontario. We're going to lead to greater investments. We know that we can bring even further investment and green jobs with respect to renewable energy in the province of Ontario.

We've made great progress, we have a good foundation, and we're going to build on that and make even greater progress towards cleaner, greener energy.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a question for the Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services. Minister, there was nothing in your economic statement yesterday to help the very people who drive the economy of Ontario: small business.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has a plan that won't cost anything and it will help small businesses. It's a three-point plan. They suggest that you waive fines and penalties for first-time non-compliance with government regulations, they suggest that you set up a single point of contact to inform small business, and they ask that you train provincial inspectors to help, rather than hurt, small business—now, that would be a novel concept. Will you agree to implement a program today based on these simple steps?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Actually, I'm very proud of the fact that we have taken very good steps to encourage and create an environment for small business in this province.

Let me just outline, for the consideration of this member and maybe for his information, some of the things that we have done. First, we have made a very concerted effort to reduce the paper burden for small business in this province. We reduced it by 24%, as I said last week in this House, in seven key ministries. Then we did it, in the second phase, in eight key ministries.

We are also moving ahead to harmonize the tax structure with our federal partners. That should also reduce the paperwork burden for small businesses.

We have reduced the capital cost allowance for small manufacturers, going back a year, and we are also working very closely with them to create—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Norm Miller: Minister, according to the legislative library, you've created 437 new regulations and removed 85. That's a five-fold increase.

In yesterday's economic statement, you did nothing to help small business. Not only that; despite Mr. McGuinty's claims that you're not raising taxes, you're actually bringing in an \$11,000 tax for construction companies with your mandatory WSIB coverage for owners and leaders of companies, so you're actually hurting business at this challenging time.

Minister, that's why the Canadian Federation of Independent Business is here at Queen's Park today to meet with your colleague the Minister of Labour, to present some 25,000 letters from concerned businesses.

Minister, you know that this has nothing to do with safety, as all employees are already covered by the WSIB. Will you listen to these businesses, go to the meeting with your colleague and demand that the minister stop this foolish move?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Minister of Labour, please.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I thank the member for the opportunity to speak to this initiative, this proposed legislation on mandatory coverage for those who are in the construction sector.

I would think that the member would not want to have an industry out there that does not have an even playing field. I would think that the member would want to protect the health and safety of all those workers. I would think that the member would want to reduce the underground economic activity that takes place in construction.

We're working with small business. We are working with the construction sector to make sure that we can address these things, to make sure that we level the playing field, to make sure that we can have stronger companies for a stronger Ontario out there.

1120

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is for the Deputy Premier. In the gallery are Tibetan Canadians and their supporters. They believe, and we in the New Democratic Party believe, that the Premier's trip to China provides a unique opportunity to send a strong message on human rights, on how the world ought to be, to the government of China.

The message is that the situation in Tibet right now is wrong, that running roughshod over human rights is not acceptable to the people of Ontario, not acceptable to the people of Canada and not acceptable to the international community.

Will the Premier send that message? Will he tell the government of China in no uncertain terms that Ontarians expect their trading partners to respect internationally accepted standards of human rights?

Hon. George Smitherman: We welcome, again, the symbolic recognition of the people of Tibet and those people from the member's riding on this point.

I think it's a very appropriate opportunity to remind members that this House did unanimously pass a motion on the issue of Tibet, a resolution which I was proud to move and to support as a member of this Legislature: "That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, as a long-standing friend of China, express concern with the current situation in Tibet and encourage the parties to engage in meaningful dialogue." I think the value of that motion stands today, as it did those few months ago when it was passed. I'm very, very certain that this falls in line

with the tradition of Ontario and of Canada of constructive engagement on these matters.

I look forward to offering more views in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: To the Deputy Premier again: That all-party resolution that was passed on April 10 has not been played out by the Premier's trip to China. He certainly has not talked about human rights, he has not met with representatives of the Tibetan community, and if he has talked about them, where are the transcripts of such a discussion? We would like to see, on this side of the House, those transcripts made public. Again, empty words, unless they're lived out by trade trips to China.

So, again I ask: On his next trip to China, will the Premier speak about Tibet and human rights? And will he meet with Tibetan-Canadians and Students for a Free Tibet as soon as possible?

Hon. George Smitherman: I find it somewhat noteworthy that that honourable member is the one who's proposing that all transcripts of all conversations that one has be brought into the public domain. I don't think that's typically the way that individuals have operated. I remind the House that this is the honourable member who once said that the Premier hadn't met with the Dalai Lama and we had to secure the actual photographic evidence to convince her otherwise.

But most certainly I would want to give that member the assurance that the resolution of this Legislature stands as a very, very firm statement of the views of the people of the province of Ontario and that our Premier and members of the government recognize it as such. I'm very, very certain that it will form, as it always would through the process of constructive engagement, part and parcel of the relationship that we have with the nation of China.

UNIVERSITY RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My question is to the Minister of Research and Innovation.

Carleton University, in my riding of Ottawa Centre, has established a reputation on the international stage for its groundbreaking research. Ranked among the top four comprehensive universities in the country, research funding has skyrocketed from \$28 million in 2000 to over \$85 million in 2007. Carleton holds 23 Canada research chairs, five NSERC chairs and four endowed chairs. To date, 26 faculty members have been inducted as fellows in the Royal Society of Canada.

What is the Ministry of Research and Innovation doing to promote fundamental, basic research taking place at Carleton and across Ontario?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank my friend from Ottawa Centre for the question.

Just the other day, I was able to be at the Canada Science and Technology Museum, in the great riding of

Ottawa South, to make an announcement as the minister responsible for the Ontario Research Fund.

First, I'd say to my friend that we've made a commitment of some \$650 million to the Ontario Research Fund, and through a peer-reviewed process, we've been able to pay for both research excellence and research infrastructure.

When I was in Ottawa with representatives of Carleton University and your new president, Dr. Roseann Runte, and also with representatives from the University of Ottawa, I was pleased to say that, between those two institutions, we'll be supporting some 11 research projects which include 47 researchers with an investment of some \$1.5 million. That brings our total investment in Ottawa to the two universities—some \$38.2 million to the University of Ottawa and \$17.9 million—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Statistics Canada data shows that for both males and females, those with a university degree have higher earnings than those without. On average, those with a degree make \$52,250, compared to \$32,750 for those without. A study by the US Census Bureau looking at earnings by level of education shows that for all workers with a Ph.D., average annual earnings stood at \$81,400, compared to \$54,000 for a master's and \$45,000 for bachelors.

It is important that these students study and then actually work in Ontario. We need to actively lay the groundwork, investing in equipment and attracting the world's leading researchers in order to draw students to our universities and create Ontario's high-paid workforce of the future.

To the Minister of Research and Innovation: What is the ministry doing to reverse the brain drain and ensure Ontario's position to lead in the 21st century?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I can share with the House that the brain drain is gone and now it is a brain gain. Let me just share with members of the House some of the world-class talent that has been attracted to our province under our leadership: Dr. Tom Hudson came from McGill University to lead the newly formed Ontario Institute for Cancer Research, an investment by our ministry of some \$347 million. Dr. Gordon Keller, a leading stem cell researcher, came from New York to Toronto to head the McEwan Centre for Regenerative Medicine. Dr. Neil Turok, a world-leading physicist, Stephen Hawking's protégé at Cambridge, is now the new executive director of the Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics in K-W. Dr. Jack Mandel, a top epidemiologist, is returning to his native Canada to be the first director of the University of Toronto's Dalla Lana School of Public Health. And Dr. Raymond Laflamme came from Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico to become the director of the Institute for Quantum Computing at the University of Waterloo. There is a—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM FUNDING

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is for the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure and it's about prioritizing for infrastructure. The McGuinty government, having manoeuvred Ontario into a deficit, finally concedes that there is a great need to prioritize government spending. Over the summer, this Liberal government threw a casino party that cost Ontario taxpayers \$2.3 million, money that could and should have been used, for example, to fund health care services at struggling York region hospitals. It could have bought CAT scanners, MRI machines for any of them or funded the long-awaited master planning stage for a future hospital in Vaughan.

Is the \$2.3 million spent for a casino party in Windsor your idea of a priority? Do you place entertainment ahead of much-needed investment in infrastructure for the health and well-being of Ontario communities like York region?

Hon. George Smitherman: I do find it curious that the honourable member stands in his place and asks such a question when his party has in place a plan to cut health care spending by \$3 billion, which would obviously be a far more destructive circumstance for York region.

On his question, which was about prioritization of infrastructure initiatives, I can tell the honourable member that we continue to work through the progress of ReNew Ontario, a five-year, \$30-billion plan which has seen unprecedented levels of investment in infrastructure—this year alone, \$9.9 billion of investment.

I'd be very, very happy to talk to the honourable member about the rationale associated with the casino introducing an entertainment facility, which has the effect of bringing more clients onsite and enhancing the revenue there, which is important, of course, for the programs that it funds and important for the thousands of people who enjoy employment as a result.

Mr. Peter Shurman: That minister can justify a casino but he can't justify why he denies essential health dollars and continues to insist that we have a plan to cut health spending when it's just not so.

Tonight, I will be joining my community at a Vaughan Health Care Foundation gala to raise funds for the Vaughan hospital, and I believe that minister will be in attendance as well. I know that all those present will want to know the plans for investment in their cause.

Minister, it is time to put your infrastructure dollars where your mouth is. Since you appear to agree that health care is a priority higher on the list than any casino party, tell this House what funds you have put aside for health care infrastructure funding, notably the master planning phase for the Vaughan hospital.

Hon. George Smitherman: Apparently the honourable member doesn't live in his riding, because if he did, just driving there, through the various routes that are available to him, he couldn't help but notice the ongoing investment that our government's making in infrastructure, especially in hospital infrastructure related to

the 905 region. I urge the honourable member: Go to Newmarket, the riding of his colleague, and see the emerging regional services that are provided there. I urge the member: Go just over to Richmond Hill to York Central and see the hospital tower that's emerging. Look just slightly to your west and see in Brampton an \$800-million hospital. All of these pieces are evidence of the renewal, the renaissance of hospitals, and it stands in very sharp contrast to a party that has on its record closing 28 hospitals. Instead, we keep them open, we rebuild them, we make them bigger and we make them better.

PUBLIC HEALTH

M^{me} France Gélinas: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. As of today, the number of suspected E. coli cases thought to have originated at Harvey's restaurant in North Bay has climbed to 190, with 36 cases confirmed. Like during the listeriosis outbreak, the public has remained calm about this E. coli outbreak due to the swift and transparent action of Dr. Catherine Whiting, North Bay's medical officer of health.

My question is simple: When will the McGuinty government follow through on the number one recommendation from the Walkerton inquiry and ensure that every public health unit has a full-time, fully qualified medical officer of health?

Hon. David Caplan: Every public health unit has a full-time, fully qualified medical officer of health. Some are in permanent positions and some are in acting positions.

I just want to say that I am confident that the necessary steps are being taken by the local public health unit in North Bay to ensure that the cases are being fully investigated. We have taken the steps necessary to protect public safety.

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is working in collaboration with our colleagues at the North Bay public health unit, with our colleagues at the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and with the Public Health Agency of Canada to investigate the outbreak.

I am very proud of Dr. Whiting and her team, who reacted with incredible swiftness to be able to protect North Bay residents and residents of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I hate to differ, but back when the Walkerton inquiry was in full swing, a third of the public health units did not have a full-time, fully qualified medical officer of health. On October 23, 2008, one third of public health units in Ontario still do not have a full-time, fully qualified medical officer of health. But Dr. Whiting is a qualified, competent physician and she has taken the right steps with this crisis to ensure that there was immediate and transparent communication.

I would like to know when this government will provide clear communication guidelines to all—whether

it be public health units, hospitals or long-term-care facilities—so that when outbreaks arrive we have this kind of clear, concise communication throughout Ontario like Dr. Whiting has demonstrated.

Hon. David Caplan: The member asks when there will be guidelines. They're already in place, as the member in her own question proves: that Dr. Whiting in fact did the right thing, took the necessary steps, provided that information to the public, just as we have, and as we have seen through other public health outbreaks that have occurred.

The member has asked about medical officers of health. She should know, and all members should know, that in our recent contract with the Ontario Medical Association there is a provision to be able to do something about the disparity in the wage rates that are paid for medical officers of health. A concerted effort is being undertaken by both the Ontario Medical Association and the Ontario government to redress the long-standing disparity.

It's this kind of collaborative effort which stands in stark contrast to the lack of effort that we've seen in previous governments. I have every confidence that, working with our medical partners, we will be able to ensure strength in public health for all Ontarians.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just ask the members—I should have introduced the individual earlier—to welcome in the east members' gallery Maurizio Gherardini, vice-president of the Toronto Raptors. Welcome today, sir.

DEFERRED VOTES

APOLOGY ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR

LA PRÉSENTATION D'EXCUSES

Deferred vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 108, An Act respecting apologies / Projet de loi 108, Loi concernant la présentation d'excuses.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1134 to 1139.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Bentley has moved second reading of Bill 108, An Act respecting apologies, 2008. All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia
Albanese, Laura
Arnott, Ted
Arthurs, Wayne
Balkissoon, Bas
Bartolucci, Rick

Duguid, Brad
Elliott, Christine
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Fonseca, Peter
Gerretsen, John
Hardeman, Ernie

Qaadri, Shafiq
Ramal, Khalil
Rinaldi, Lou
Runciman, Robert W.
Ruprecht, Tony
Sandals, Liz

Bentley, Christopher
Best, Margaret
Bradley, James J.
Broten, Laurel C.
Brownell, Jim
Bryant, Michael
Cansfield, Donna H.
Caplan, David
Carroll, Aileen
Chan, Michael
Chudleigh, Ted
Colle, Mike
Crozier, Bruce
Delaney, Bob
Dickson, Joe
Dombrowsky, Leona

Hoy, Pat
Jeffrey, Linda
Jones, Sylvia
Klees, Frank
Kwinter, Monte
Lalonde, Jean-Marc
Leal, Jeff
Matthews, Deborah
McMeekin, Ted
Meilleur, Madeleine
Miller, Norm
Moridi, Reza
Naqvi, Yasir
Oraziotti, David
Phillips, Gerry
Pupatello, Sandra

Scott, Laurie
Sergio, Mario
Shurman, Peter
Smith, Monique
Smitherman, George
Sorbara, Greg
Sousa, Charles
Takhar, Harinder S.
Van Bommel, Maria
Watson, Jim
Wilkinson, John
Wilson, Jim
Witmer, Elizabeth
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Yakubski, John
Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed?

Nays

Horwath, Andrea
Kormos, Peter

Marchese, Rosario
Prue, Michael

Tabuns, Peter

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 66; the nays are 5.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I request that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy.

There being no further business, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1143 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Mr. Norm Miller: On the occasion of Ontario Public Library Week, I'm most pleased to offer my congratulations to the Bracebridge Public Library on its 100th anniversary. The Bracebridge Public Library was made possible by a donation from entrepreneur and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. Headed by CEO and chief librarian Cathryn Rodney, the library has been celebrating its centennial with a number of different events, including a tribute to Andrew Carnegie, an official birthday party, a cruise, an antiques appraisal event and a genealogy workshop.

Patrick Boyer's commemorative book *Local Library, Global Passport: The Evolution of a Carnegie Library* chronicles the library's history and was launched as part of its centennial celebration. The Boyer family has been connected with the Bracebridge Public Library for many years. Patrick Boyer's father, former MPP Robert J. Boyer, was a long-time supporter of the library. The

library's Robert J. Boyer reading room was opened in his honour several years ago. His mother, Patricia M. Boyer, formerly Miss Patricia Johnson, was chief librarian from 1934 to 1938. The library's Patricia M. Boyer children's library is named after Mrs. Boyer.

We are very fortunate in Parry Sound-Muskoka to have a number of great community libraries.

I also would like to send my congratulations to the MacTier Public Library on its grand opening this Saturday, October 25.

I hope that you all join me in thanking the staff, volunteers and benefactors of all our public libraries across Ontario.

GOVERNMENT INVESTMENTS

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: It's with great pleasure that I rise in the House today to inform all members of the exciting new initiatives taking place in Kitchener-Waterloo to ensure that it continues to grow and prosper. Those of us from the area and from the riding of Kitchener-Conestoga already know it's a great place to experience the best of urban and country living.

The McGuinty government is committed to responding to the challenges of growing cities through a series of funding initiatives that will improve the lives of all residents. Some of these recent initiatives include: The University of Waterloo received \$8 million for its downtown Kitchener health sciences campus; Wilfrid Laurier received \$3 million to expand its renowned music facility; Conestoga College received \$21 million to expand programs in skilled trades and to welcome 3,000 more students and apprentices; the region of Waterloo received \$27.6 million for 945 new rental and supportive housing units, \$2.2 million for 160 housing allowance units, and \$1.8 million for 185 home ownership units.

These investments in education and affordable housing symbolize the McGuinty government's belief in strong cities and underscore our commitment to improving the lives of all Ontarians.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I must put on the record my disgust for the way in which the Minister of Community and Social Services is treating thousands of grandparents looking after grandchildren in Ontario.

Temporary care assistance is a program that gave \$230 per month to assist grandparents with the additional costs associated with caring for their grandchildren, many of whom have additional and extraordinary expenses as a result of medical conditions such as fetal alcohol syndrome.

To date, the minister has said that if the grandparents need help, they can apply for social assistance—not true. The minister must know that once an Ontario resident turns 65, they no longer qualify for social assistance and would be turned away. The minister has also said that these grandparents can apply for kinship benefits—again,

not true. If the grandchildren are already in the care of grandparents, they do not qualify for the kinship money.

As a result of this minister's decision to remove temporary care assistance, as many as 15,000 Ontario children will be left with no assistance. Where will these children go if their grandparents cannot afford to continue to care for them?

It's time that this minister stopped putting up barriers, does the right thing and gives back grandparents the temporary care assistance so that these grandchildren can continue to live with their own family in a caring and nurturing home. Grandparents can't and should not be abandoned by this uncaring Liberal government.

HERBERT WILLIAMS FIRE EQUIPMENT

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I'm pleased to inform the Legislature of a success story of a family-owned business in my riding of Scarborough-Rouge River. The original company, Herbert Williams Fire Equipment, incorporated in 1908, recently celebrated 100 years in business in Scarborough, Ontario. Herbert I, Herbert II and grandsons Bill and George sold and serviced fire equipment to many of Toronto's established institutions, such as the Empire, National and Toronto Cricket clubs, the Toronto Board of Trade, old city hall and many more.

In 1966, Herbert II retired, knowing that his two sons, Bill and George, would carry on the family business with the same high standard of quality and service. Bill and George expanded into the manufacturing of metal fire-related products and portable fire extinguishers. The one company became two: the Williams Brothers Corp. and Strike First Corp., and expanded into the US market.

The Williams Brothers remains today a respected Ontario manufacturer, employing 110 people. On behalf of the province of Ontario, I offer congratulations to the Williams family on celebrating 100 years of success in Scarborough and contributing to fire safety and prevention worldwide.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Ms. Laurie Scott: Yesterday, in his economic update, the Minister of Finance used the word "prudent" four times. That's one "prudent" for every \$7.75 billion the provincial debt has increased under Dalton McGuinty's Ontario. The dictionary definition of "prudent" is "exercising good judgment or common sense."

Patients and families in Ontario are forced to put their hard-earned money towards the over \$12 billion in the Liberal health tax coffers. Minister Duncan is now telling families that he needs to save money, so he's cutting them off from opportunities for health care because he feels it's prudent—oh, but he's not returning their health tax to them.

In 2006, Minister Duncan said, "Our government remains on track to eliminate the fiscal deficit no later than 2008-09." Fast-forward to yesterday and the minister told us something entirely different: He's right on

track to bringing Ontario into a \$500-million deficit. Seven months ago the Minister of Finance told Ontario he had more than \$6 billion in surplus and reserves; only four weeks ago he said his finances were on track; now he has the fortitude to tell Ontarians to hunker down and be prudent.

Ontarians know that spending over \$6 billion of taxpayers' money in less than seven months is far from prudent—it's disgusting. There is also a second definition provided to the Minister of Finance's commonly used word "prudent." It's this: "Being careful in regard to one's own interests." So let me be the first in the House to recognize the Minister of Finance for being so unwavering in his carefulness and his protection of—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

BEAUTIFUL WOMEN PROJECT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Women are extraordinary and important members of society. Women make incredible contributions to Ontario communities and have shouldered enormous burdens and challenges throughout history. Women are leaders for change.

All too often, girls and women struggle with questions of image and self-acceptance. When 13-year-olds are saving for breast implants and when girls as young as seven and eight develop eating disorders, something is terribly amiss.

In Hamilton last May, I attended a showing of the Beautiful Women Project, a touring art and educational presentation for women and girls, boys and men. It addresses the questions of wellness and self-esteem. The creative brainchild of Ottawa-based artist Cheryl-Ann Webster and project manager Laurie Gordon, the show consists of 120 clay torsos of actual women aged 19 to 91. The Beautiful Women Project aims to raise awareness about the link between self-worth, self-identity and physical appearance. It's a community-based, not-for-profit effort that enjoys widespread backing from a variety of individuals, communities and business sponsors. It's a wonderful exhibit for the entire family to see, a powerful attraction that is geared to help people feel great about themselves. As one audience member put it, the Beautiful Women Project is "a feast for the eyes and a treat for the soul." I encourage people to contact beautifulwomenproject.com to either book a visit of the exhibit in your riding or to buy the Beautiful Women Project book online and support this important initiative.

1310

COMMUNITY CLEANUP

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I am pleased to inform the members of this House about a community cleanup in London-Fanshawe. Last Tuesday night, neighbours came together to clean up graffiti in my riding. This was organized by the Neighbourhood Resource Association of Westminster Park. This effort was a real community partnership. Neighbourhood Watch donated environ-

mentally friendly graffiti cleaner. Businesses in the neighbourhood donated paint and primer, as well as food and drinks for the volunteers. Residents were joined by students from the police foundations program at Fanshawe College.

About 30 people came out on a cold, rainy night to clean up the most heavily tagged building in the neighbourhood. The property owners and the tenants in the plazas were thrilled with the result.

Sheri Denomme is the community development worker who shepherded the cleanup after residents identified graffiti as the biggest visual blight in the neighbourhood. The participation of the police foundations students was a great effort on behalf of my community. I want to thank them all and congratulate everyone who participated in this effort.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I rise in the House to speak about our government's ongoing commitment to Ontario seniors. The McGuinty government values the contribution seniors have made to this province throughout their working lives and is dedicated to providing them with the highest level of care.

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care recently announced an additional \$23.3 million to support the creation of 873 personal support worker positions in long-term-care homes. This will increase the average paid hours of direct daily care per resident to 3.26 hours.

This initial investment is part of the McGuinty government's plan to add 2,500 new personal support workers and 2,000 nurses in long-term-care homes. This will increase the average hours of daily care per resident in long-term care to 3.5 hours. Seniors in long-term-care homes will benefit from these investments through more hands-on care such as personal hygiene care, help with transferring them into chairs, vehicles or beds, as well as with dressing and undressing.

The residents of York South-Weston, and Ontarians in general, want their government to invest in seniors, and while there is more to be done, increasing daily care averages will go a long way in improving the lives of our seniors in this province.

WASTE REDUCTION WEEK

Mr. Charles Sousa: It is with great pleasure that I rise today to recognize Waste Reduction Week and some of the exciting initiatives being undertaken to ensure a greener, cleaner Ontario.

Much progress has been made over the last five years, but this government also knows that to ensure a green future, we must involve the younger generations of this province.

We commend the Recycling Council of Ontario for sharing this vision, and we were pleased to join them and Oscar the Grouch, the beloved Sesame Street character, as they kicked off Waste Reduction Week across Canada.

We were also pleased to provide \$40,000 to support their recent initiatives to assist youth and adults in implementing waste minimization and conservation strategies in their homes, schools and businesses. These initiatives include assisting municipalities in implementing waste, audits and recycling programs; developing homework assignments to make students aware of current waste statistics; and encouraging companies to market environmentally friendly products. These initiatives will go a long way to creating the greener Ontario we need for future prosperity.

In this spirit, I had the honour of introducing Bill 105, the Waste Reporting Act, to encourage increased recycling and waste reduction.

So that we can protect our environment and grow our recycling industry, I encourage all members in this House, and all Ontarians, to celebrate the spirit of Waste Reduction Week, not only today but every day throughout the year.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

CORONERS AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES CORONERS

Mr. Bartolucci moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 115, An Act to amend the Coroners Act / *Projet de loi 115, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les coroners.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The minister for a short statement.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I'll make a statement during ministerial statements.

PENSION BENEFITS AMENDMENT ACT (UNLOCKING PENSION FUNDS), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES RÉGIMES DE RETRAITE (DÉBLOCAGE DES FONDS DE RETRAITE)

Mr. Chudleigh moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 116, An Act to amend the Pension Benefits Act to allow transfers of locked-in pension funds to registered retirement income funds / *Projet de loi 116, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les régimes de retraite pour permettre le transfert de fonds de retraite immobilisés à des fonds enregistrés de revenu de retraite.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I'd like to thank my page, Adriane Pong, for taking that up to you, Speaker. She's from my riding, so it's very special.

Currently pension funds that are in locked-in accounts cannot be withdrawn except in specified circumstances. This bill amends the Pension Benefit Act to allow up to the entire amount in the account to be transferred into a registered retirement income fund. The transfer can be made at age 55 or, if the pension plan provides for retirement at an earlier age, at that age. It gives Ontarians access to their own money.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

CORONER'S OFFICE

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I rise in the House this afternoon to introduce the Coroners Amendment Act, 2008, which, if passed, will significantly strengthen Ontario's death investigation system. These amendments represent the first modernization of the Coroners Act since the 1970s. Even when taken against the backdrop of the measures that this government has already implemented to improve death investigations in Ontario, this overhaul is long overdue. Members will recall that on October 1, Commissioner Steven Goudge delivered his recommendations following a thorough and forthright inquiry into pediatric forensic pathology in Ontario. Our government called for this inquiry in 2007.

The actions being proposed today encompass but also reach far beyond pediatric forensic pathology to correct what is wrong in the death investigation system and to help prevent something like this from ever happening again. The proposed amendments meet with the intent of the legislative framework recommended in Commissioner Goudge's report. At all times, we must be sympathetic to the fact that when a death is being investigated, it involves members of the public at a sensitive time when their emotional state is at its lowest and that the system cannot turn a deaf ear against legitimate concerns over how an investigation was handled.

Today I am introducing amendments that would deliver a higher standard of oversight and accountability, greater public accessibility and transparency throughout the death investigation system in Ontario. Today's proposed legislation aims to build on the improvements to the system that our government has been making since 2003. Public confidence can only exist when the integrity of the system stands above reproach. These proposed amendments would establish a death investigation oversight council to oversee the work of the chief coroner and the chief forensic pathologist. This oversight council would be made up of qualified judicial, medical and government representatives with the knowledge to set the

highest standards of practice and the expertise to make certain, through strict monitoring and reporting, that these standards are met. The Lieutenant Governor would be making all appointments to this council.

An important component of the oversight council would be the public complaints committee. In the past, the death investigation system has lacked accessibility for those who have had legitimate concerns about an autopsy or the conduct of a coroner or a pathologist. Accessibility is the key to public confidence in a system that is, quite literally, life and death. A public complaints committee would ensure access for families to file a complaint, and serious concerns over the death investigation system would be taken seriously and would be investigated thoroughly.

1320

The legislation being introduced today recognizes the complex and important role forensic pathology plays in death investigations. These amendments propose centralizing forensic pathology under the chief forensic pathologist to ensure consistent, high-quality standards for forensic pathology across the province.

We are also proposing a registry of practising pathologists to ensure that all pathologists employed in a post-mortem examination in the province of Ontario are duly qualified and will perform at or above the appropriate standard.

The objective of this proposed legislation is clear. The government seeks to serve Ontarians with a death investigation system that has greater oversight; improves public accessibility; and is more transparent, with stronger accountability.

I am also proposing in this legislation to remove my power and the power of future Ministers of Community Safety and Correctional Services to call an inquest. The Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services is made up of organizations that have operational autonomy from government in order to serve the people of Ontario effectively. The chief coroner has the scientific expertise and experience required to determine when an inquest should be held. Having the minister make a decision contrary to the chief coroner's would be inconsistent with the arm's-length relationship between the chief coroner and government.

But I want to remind you and the House, Mr. Speaker, that the chief coroner's decision on whether to call an inquest could still be subject to a judicial review, should the decision be questioned. The decision whether or not to hold an inquest must be based on science and for the public good.

The legislation being introduced today builds on progress our government has already made to strengthen Ontario's death investigation system, such as nearly doubling annual funding to the Office of the Chief Coroner to \$36 million. This government will also continue to review and evaluate the resources needed as we further strengthen the death investigation system, provide for greater oversight and accountability, and improve coroner and pathology services throughout Ontario.

I believe that this is also the will of every member in this House.

NATIONAL FOSTER FAMILY WEEK

SEMAINE NATIONALE DES FAMILLES D'ACCUEIL

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I rise today to honour National Foster Family Week. Around the country, people are celebrating those heroes of our communities who welcome people into their homes and into their hearts. When families cannot give loved ones the daily physical and emotional care they need, when families need time to get back on their feet, les familles d'accueil de l'Ontario entrent en scène.

Les familles d'accueil créent des foyers chaleureux où les enfants et les jeunes peuvent se développer en étant confiés à une famille stable. Pour cela, elles méritent notre admiration et nos sincères remerciements.

As we pause to honour the contributions of foster families throughout the province, I'd like to draw your attention to the foster families we rarely hear about. These foster families host adults with a developmental disability. As they welcome adults with a developmental disability into their lives, they help them become a part of our communities.

Vivre avec une famille d'accueil dans un appartement, une copropriété ou une maison donne aux adultes qui ont une déficience intellectuelle davantage de liberté et de possibilités de se développer. Ces personnes instaurent de nouvelles relations, se joignent à de nouveaux réseaux sociaux et ont davantage de liens avec leurs collectivités. Les lettres que j'ai reçues de certaines familles d'accueil confirment combien cette vie dans la collectivité est précieuse.

I learned that Nicole, a young woman, is now enjoying more autonomy living in a condo with the warm-hearted M^{me} Lajoie in Ottawa and that the entire condo community benefits from Nicole's presence. M^{me} Lajoie said, "I chose to open my condo and my heart and welcome an adult with a developmental disability. Receiving her into my home was certainly the best decision I could have made.... She deserves her place in the centre of my family."

J'ai aussi appris qu'un jeune homme du nom de Michel fait maintenant des progrès remarquables en habitant chez un M. Hupé, et que M. Hupé a acquis un nouvel ami.

It is stories like these that prove how important Ontario's new developmental services law really is. It gives adults with a developmental disability the right mix of services and supports to participate in their communities so that they truly belong.

Et nous sommes très fiers des Ontariennes et des Ontariens qui respectent l'esprit de cette loi par leurs actes : des Ontariennes et des Ontariens qui accueillent des personnes de toutes aptitudes dans nos collectivités—Ontarians who prove that the families we're born into

and the families we make are what keep this province strong.

People with a developmental disability give back to Ontario communities as much as they receive, and foster families that include adults with a developmental disability enjoy the rich experience that people with different abilities bring.

Les familles d'accueil de l'Ontario aident à bâtir des collectivités diversifiées qui soutiennent les gens dans toutes les situations. Elles veillent à ce que les collectivités de l'Ontario soient des endroits chaleureux et accueillants pour grandir et se sentir à sa place.

I would like to thank my colleague and friend Children and Youth Services Minister Deb Matthews for her support. On behalf of this government, I would like to thank foster families of all kinds for their openness, generosity and commitment to Ontarians in need. They prove that charity begins in the heart of Ontario's homes.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

NATIONAL FOSTER FAMILY WEEK

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to acknowledge the work of the National Foster Family Week. I wanted to start with quoting from the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies. Cecile Brookes, the president of the Foster Parents Society of Ontario, says, "The celebration of Foster Family Week brings attention to and honours foster parents who play a critical role in achieving and supporting permanency outcomes for children in care by providing a place a child can call home." It's a wonderful acknowledgement of the selflessness of so many Ontario families who are willing to open up their homes and foster children.

I can't let this statement go by without acknowledging one family in particular. Bernice and Rolland Desnoyers from Leamington were, in December 2007, awarded the Order of Ontario because as of that date—they may have extended this now—they'd raised over 65 foster children in their home, an incredible example of what individuals can do to make a change in our society.

1330

The only other thing I would like to highlight is again from the children's aid societies of Ontario. This is a quote from their press release: "In the past few years, the number of foster families has decreased. More families who can provide safe, temporary care to vulnerable children are needed so that every child can have the opportunity to grow up in a loving family home." And what does this government do as a solution? This government removes temporary care access for grandparents; to quote a grandparent from Belleville, "because the Ontario government persists in making decisions without regard to common sense or responsibility.

"My wife and I are senior citizens who have been raising two of our granddaughters for the last 11 years....

"Our family income is very low: old age security, Canada pension and whatever else we can earn. The girls' biological parents cannot help us....

"The only way we have been able to manage so far has been the so-called 'temporary care' allowance from Ontario."

He goes on to talk about how he would not qualify for the kinship benefits because the children were already in his care. He says, "This is amazing ... close to 15,000 children who will be kicked off the 'Meilleur' program, and who will not qualify under the 'Matthews' program. What should we grandparents do? We cannot morally turn these children back to the children's aid from whence most of them came, although that would cost Ontario taxpayers nearly \$1,000 a month per child."

As we acknowledge National Foster Family Week, I think it's terribly unfortunate that we also have to highlight the ignorance and the lack of caring that is coming from across the floor with the removal of the temporary care access.

CORONER'S OFFICE

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I'm responding briefly to the introduction of the Coroners Amendment Act. Off the top, I would like to commend Judge Goudge for the outstanding work he did and the very clear and unequivocal language in which he outlined his findings. Most commendable, the government minister is indicating that they're accepting all of the commissioner's recommendations. We very much appreciate that and are very supportive of that decision.

My only question in briefly reading over the statement is that although we like to see something like this move quickly—I think that view would be shared by all members of the Legislature—the government has this tendency to throw in a poison pill or two on matters that you may otherwise find consensus with throughout the assembly. I note here near the end that he's talked about removing the power of future ministers to call inquests. I'm not sure if ever that right has been utilized. It may have been, some years back, but it certainly has not been abused. What this is really doing, I think, is removing another safeguard, an accountability mechanism as well, for the government of the day. I am initially concerned about that one aspect of the minister's announcement here today. That may cause concerns amongst my colleagues. It will have to be caucused.

But aside from that, in terms of accepting Judge Goudge's recommendations, we're wholeheartedly in support of moving in that direction.

Mr. Peter Kormos: On a point of order, Speaker: I'm seeking unanimous consent to stand down our response to Minister Meilleur so that she can be here to hear it.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member knows that (a) he should not be making reference to the presence or non-presence of a member and (b) it is not a point of order.

CORONER'S OFFICE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I am going to first respond to the bill that the minister brought forward in terms of the

government's initiatives around the Goudge report. New Democrats as well appreciate the opportunity that the Goudge report and recommendations brought to increase our trust and our ability to have faith in the system of our coroners and of death reviews. That entire package is important, but to take away the minister's right to actually call for an inquest is absolutely unacceptable. I have to say that I was shocked when I opened the package and noticed that piece in this recommendation.

We know very well in this House that there is a particular inquest that should have been called by this minister under section 22: the inquest for young Jared Osidacz, who was killed by his own father. The only inquest that Jared is getting is the inquest that stems from the fact that his father was killed by police. What does this minister do? He uses the first opportunity to remove himself from that equation, to take away the only hope that Julie Craven had to have her son have his own stand-alone inquest in the province of Ontario. It is a shameful abdication of responsibility by this minister. Not only once, but twice has this joint inquest been postponed or cancelled.

Now here we have, conveniently—I wonder why now, in retrospect, looking at what the minister put before us today, that was delayed. Why were those inquests postponed? So that the minister could table legislation in this House to give himself cover so he doesn't have to respond to the demands of the grievance? Unacceptable and shameful. So here we have us going backwards again in the province of Ontario—removing the right of the people of this province to demand accountability from their government and from the ministers of the crown. It's absolutely unacceptable.

So, what are we left with? We're left with a child, as a result of a history of domestic violence in his family, being murdered. We're left with a system now where the minister is saying that he is going to take a hands-off approach, we're left knowing that the very pieces around why that murder happened will never be appropriately investigated, and we're left with the watering down of the rights of the people of Ontario to have their elected members, particularly their ministers, speak on their behalf on important issues like the death of loved ones and the people in their community—completely unacceptable, and a shame on this government.

NATIONAL FOSTER FAMILY WEEK

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Mr. Speaker, I also have the opportunity to make a few remarks about the announcement from the Minister of Community and Social Services, who happens to be unable to hear my comments. And I think that New Democrats are—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just remind the member: Your own member rose on a point of order on this issue. I just remind you about making reference to absences.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker.

New Democrats also want to acknowledge and commend foster families—foster men, foster women,

foster parents—across the province of Ontario. They do incredible work. They provide love and care for children in sometimes the most difficult of circumstances, and when that system of giving those kids a chance for a normal type of home life works, it works very well.

But it's very ironic that as we're set to commemorate this important week, today in this very House we had a member who was so incensed by the callous disregard of the Minister of Community and Social Services for the work that is being done by grandparents across Ontario who are taking care of their at-risk grandchildren, who are in effect *de facto* fostering those grandchildren—the callous disregard of this minister: to pull away any financial aid, any hope of a meagre amount of assistance from the government to help those grandparents with those kids. Often those children have real problems, not dissimilar to the problems that children have who are in foster care in the regular system. There's fetal alcohol syndrome; they have all kinds of challenges. These grandparents are doing great work, and this minister pulls the rug out from under them.

PETITIONS

PROTECTION FOR MINERS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition from the people of Pembroke and Petawawa.

"Whereas the current legislation contained in the Ontario health and safety act and regulations for mines and mining plants does not adequately protect the lives of miners, we request revisions to the act;

"Lyle Everett Defoe and the scoop tram he was operating fell 150 feet down an open stope (July 23, 2007). Lyle was 25 years and 15 days old when he was killed at Xstrata Kidd Creek mine site, Timmins.

"Section R-60 (page 60 of Mining Regulations), paragraph 74 states that, 'A shaft, raise or other opening in an underground mine shall be securely fenced, covered or otherwise guarded. RRO 1990, Reg. 854s 75(1).' The stope where Lyle was killed was protected by a length of orange plastic snow fence and a rope with a warning sign. These barriers would not have been visible if the bucket of the scoop tram was raised. Lyle's body was recovered from behind the scoop tram.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Concrete berms must be mandatory to protect all open stopes and raises;

"All miners and contractors working underground must have working communication devices and personal locators;

"All equipment involved in injuries and fatalities must be recovered and examined unless such recovery would endanger the lives of others; and

"The entire act must be reviewed and amended to better protect underground workers."

I fully support this petition and will affix my name to it and send it with page Elise.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Joe Dickson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Rouge Valley Health board reversed the 2006 announcement closing the maternity and pediatric services at the Ajax-Pickering hospital due to an overwhelming public outcry; and

"Whereas the Rouge Valley Health board of directors has recently approved closing the 20-bed mental health unit at the Ajax-Pickering hospital; and

"Whereas there remains further concern by residents for future maternity/pediatric closings; and ...

"Whereas there is a natural boundary, the Rouge Valley, that clearly separates the two distinct areas of Scarborough and Durham region;

"We, the undersigned, therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Central East Local Health Integration Network (CE-LHIN) and the Rouge Valley Health System (RVHS) board of directors review the Rouge Valley Health System makeup and group Scarborough Centenary hospital with the three other Scarborough hospitals; and

"Further, that we position Ajax-Pickering hospital within Lakeridge Health, thus combining all of our hospitals in Durham region under one Durham region administration."

I will affix my signature to this and pass it to Andrew.

CHILD PROTECTION

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Whereas Ontario is one of the few provinces that does not have independent oversight of child welfare administration; and

"Whereas eight provinces now have independent oversight of child welfare issues, including child protection; and

"Whereas all provincial Ombudsmen first identified child protection as a priority issue in 1986 and still Ontario does not allow the Ombudsman to investigate people's complaints about children's aid societies' decisions; and

"Whereas people wronged by CAS decisions concerning placement, access, custody or care are not allowed to appeal those decisions to the Ontario Ombudsman's office;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we support the Ombudsman having the power to probe decisions and investigate complaints concerning the province's children's aid societies (CAS)."

I've signed this.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Milton District Hospital was designed to serve a population of 30,000 and the town of Milton is now home to more than 69,000 people and is still growing rapidly; and

"Whereas the town of Milton is the fastest-growing town in Canada and was forced into that rate of growth by an act of the Ontario Legislature called 'Places to Grow'; and

"Whereas the town of Milton is projected to have a population of 101,600 people in 2014, which is the earliest date an expansion could be completed; and

"Whereas the current Milton facility is too small to accommodate Milton's explosive growth and parts of the hospital prohibit the integration of new outpatient clinics and diagnostic technologies;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure take the necessary steps to ensure timely approval and construction of the expansion to Milton District Hospital."

I'm pleased to pass this to Ethan and sign this petition with my name.

TUITION

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition from Local 30 of the students' general association of Laurentian University that will add to the 50,000 names that were submitted by the member from Trinity-Spadina yesterday. They want to drop tuition fees and increase funding for post-secondary education. It reads:

"Whereas undergraduate tuition fees in Ontario have increased by 195% since 1990 and are the third-highest in all of the provinces in Canada; and

"Whereas average student debt in Ontario has skyrocketed by 250% in the last 15 years to over \$25,000 for four years of study; and

"Whereas international students pay three to four times more for the same education, and domestic students in professional programs such as law or medicine pay as much tuition as \$20,000 per year; and

"Whereas 70% of new jobs require post-secondary education, and fees reduce the opportunity for many low- and middle-income families while magnifying barriers for aboriginal, rural, racialized and other marginalized students; and

"Whereas Ontario currently provides the lowest per capita funding for post-secondary education in Canada, while many countries fully fund higher education and charge little or no fees for college and university; and

"Whereas public opinion polls show that nearly three quarters of Ontarians think the government's Reaching Higher framework for tuition fee increases of 20% to 36% over four years is unfair;"

They petition the Ontario Legislature “to introduce a new framework” that would do three things:

“(1) Reduces tuition and ancillary fees annually for students.

“(2) Converts a portion of every student loan into a grant.

“(3) Increases per student funding above the national average.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the Clerk’s table with page Andrew.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have a petition today. I’d like to thank Dr. Ike Ahmed for collecting signatures for this petition from his patients at the Credit Valley EyeCare centre.

“Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital ... activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

“Whereas ‘day surgery’ procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer ... stay in hospital;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to ‘day surgery’ procedures that comprise ... four fifths of all surgical procedures performed.”

I agree with this petition. I will affix my signature to it and give it to page Chloe.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Page Chloe is having a birthday today.

I have a petition:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the current Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital is fully utilized; and

“Whereas Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital was sized to serve a town of Oakville population of 130,000, and the current population is now ... 170,000”—40,000 more people; and

“Whereas the population of Oakville continues to grow as mandated by ‘Places to Grow,’ an act of the Ontario Legislature, and is projected to be 187,500 in 2012, the completion date for a new facility in the original time frame; and

“Whereas residents of the town of Oakville are entitled to” have access to “the same quality of health care as all Ontarians; and

“Whereas hospital facilities in the surrounding area do not have capacity to absorb Oakville’s overflow needs;

“Therefore, be it resolved that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure take the necessary steps to ensure the new Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital be completed under its original timelines without further delay.”

I’m pleased to put my signature on this and pass it to page Adriane.

IDENTITY THEFT

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I want to thank the Consumer Federation of Canada, who sent these petitions to me on this important issue, on identity theft. The petition reads as follows:

“To the Parliament of Ontario and to the Minister of Government Services:

“Whereas identity theft is the fastest-growing crime in North America;

“Whereas confidential and private information is being stolen on a regular basis, affecting literally thousands of people;

“Whereas the cost of this crime exceeds billions of dollars;

“Whereas countless hours are wasted to restore one’s good credit rating;

“We, the undersigned, demand that Bill 38, which passed the second reading unanimously in the Ontario Legislature ... be brought before committee and that the following issues be included for consideration and debate:

“(1) All consumer reports should be provided in a truncated (masked-out) form, protecting our vital private information such as SIN and credit card numbers.

“(2) Should a credit bureau discover that there has been a breach of consumer information, the agency should immediately inform the victimized consumer.

“(3) Credit bureaus should only report inquiries resulting out of actual applications for credit and for no other reasons.

“(4) Credit bureaus should investigate any complaints within 30 days and correct or automatically delete any information found unconfirmed or inaccurate.”

Since I agree, I’m delighted to sign my name to it.

1350

BEER RETAILING AND DISTRIBUTION

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the current system, practice and arrangement of retailing and distributing beer in the province of Ontario—and more specifically, the ‘near monopoly’ of The Beer Store—severely restricts the accessibility,

convenience and choice for retail consumers of beer in Ontario; and

"Whereas The Beer Store 'near monopoly' is controlled by 'for-profit, foreign-owned companies' and these companies are not accountable to the people of Ontario, and these companies do not act in the best interests of the people of Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That legislation be introduced that will permit the retailing and distribution of beer through alternative and additional grocery and supermarket retail channels that will fairly compete with The Beer Store, thereby allowing an accessible, convenient, safe, well-regulated and environmentally responsible retailing environment for beer to become established in the province of Ontario."

I agree with this petition. I am pleased to sign it and pass it to my page, Ethan.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition here that has been sent to me by Dr. Ike Ahmed and his patients at Credit Valley EyeCare in Erin Mills. It is about the western Mississauga ambulatory surgery centre, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I am pleased to sign and support this petition, and to ask page Cole to carry it for me.

HIGHWAY 35

Ms. Laurie Scott: "Highway 35 Four-Laning
"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas modern highways are economic lifelines to communities across Ontario and crucial to the growth of Ontario's economy; and

"Whereas the Ministry of Transportation has been planning the expansion of Highway 35...; and

"Whereas Highway 35 provides an important economic link in the overall transportation system—carrying commuter, commercial and high tourist volumes to and from the Kawartha Lakes area and Haliburton;...

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Liberal government move swiftly to complete the four-laning of Highway 35 after the completion of the final public consultation."

This is signed by many people from my riding and I affix my signature.

ONTARIO SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Thank you for recognizing me, Mr. Speaker, on this in the last few minutes.

This petition supports Bill 50, the Provincial Animal Welfare Act.

"Whereas the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act has not been updated since 1919;

"Whereas Bill 50 would require all veterinarians to report suspected abuse and neglect, protecting veterinarians from liability;

"Whereas it would allow the OSPCA to inspect and investigate places where animals are kept;

"Whereas the bill would prohibit the training of animals to fight;

"Whereas Bill 50 would allow the OSPCA to inspect roadside zoos;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 50, entitled the Provincial Animal Welfare Act, 2008, to protect our animal friends."

I agree and I sign it as well.

OPPOSITION DAY MOTION

Hon. Monique M. Smith: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd just like to raise with you today a concern that we have with respect to the opposition day motion presented by the member for Leeds–Grenville which is to be debated on Tuesday. It is my contention, Mr. Speaker, that the motion itself violates the sub judice convention as well as standing order 23(g).

As you know, the sub judice convention is a restriction on the part of a legislative body to refrain from discussing matters that are before a judicial or quasi-judicial body, and no distinction is made between criminal and civil proceedings. As well, the convention can exist to prevent prejudice to a judicial case by the discussion of that case in a public or influential body.

Standing order 23 states that in a debate, a member shall be called to order by the Speaker if he or she:

"(g) Refers to any matter that is the subject of a proceeding,

"(i) that is pending in a court or before a judge for judicial determination; or

“(ii) that is before any quasi-judicial body constituted by the House or by or under the authority of an act of the Legislature,

“where it is shown to the satisfaction of the Speaker that further reference would create a real and substantial danger of prejudice to the proceeding.”

In his motion, the member for Leeds–Grenville has made reference to evidence and concerns. I believe that, in debating this motion, it would require that members of this House on all sides comment directly on an ongoing criminal proceeding. Unlike question period, it is clear that the proceedings in this case are before the courts. The whole debate surrounds a court proceeding that is presently under way, and I would request that you rule on whether or not the motion violates both the sub judice convention and standing order 23(g).

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Member from Whitby–Oshawa on the same point of order.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: If I could just respond to the point that the member has raised with respect to the opposition day motion which has been tabled for next Tuesday: I would submit that it should not be necessary to discuss the specifics of any case that’s presently before the courts. The matter is more one of general application in discussing some of the rules regarding the apprehension of people who have been charged with these serious criminal offences and not applying house arrest. It does not necessarily require any reference to any specific matter that is presently before the courts, but it can be discussed in the context of a more general rule.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I want to thank the Minister of Tourism and the member from Whitby–Oshawa. There’s only one person who should be standing, and when—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Do you remember Bert Johnson? Good old Bert.

I have heard the Minister of Tourism’s point of order, and I’ve heard the comments made by the member from Whitby–Oshawa. I will take both under advisement and will take the comments of both into consideration in reviewing the motion that has been laid before the House.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ PUBLIC BUSINESS

SENIORS’ OMBUDSMAN ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR L’OMBUDSMAN DES PERSONNES ÂGÉES

Mr. Sergio moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 102, An Act to establish the Seniors’ Ombudsman / Projet de loi 102, Loi créant le poste d’ombudsman des personnes âgées.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to standing order 97, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Mario Sergio: The intent of Bill 102 is to create the office of the seniors’ ombudsman to investigate complaints and make recommendations respecting the impact on seniors of the administration of public bodies in Ontario.

I would like to thank, first of all, my staff, who have been very busy providing all the information necessary to complete the bill, and our legislative legal staff for providing the bill in a timely fashion so that it could be debated today.

We have some 1.7 million seniors in the province of Ontario, making up something like 14% of our population, which is distributed on a fairly even basis throughout our province. Riding for riding, it amounts to something like 15,000 seniors in each riding that we all represent. The number of 1,700,000 seniors—it is bound to be something over two million seniors in about 2012–13.

I am delighted today to have in the chamber and witnessing the procedures of the House in the east lobby—I don’t know if they are all here, but I have received a number of not only wonderful submissions and quotes but support for Bill 102. There’s a number of them here today in the east lobby. Specifically—not in any particular order—we have, from the United Senior Citizens of Ontario, Marie Smith and Richard Stack; from Canada’s Association for the 50 Plus, better known as CARP, Susan Eng, Anne Gravel and Jonathan Schwartz; from the Ontario Retirement Communities Association, Tracy Fairfield; from Care Watch Toronto, Charlotte Maher and a guest; from the Canadian Snowbird Association—who doesn’t know that?—Mike MacKenzie; from the family counsels program, Samantha Peck; from the Ontario Family Council Program, Rose Marie Grycaj; from the Multicultural Council of Ontario Seniors, Zul Kassamali, and he will be here tentatively. It’s nice to see they are present and to have their support as well.

1400

Often we patronize our seniors during the month of June, the month dedicated to our seniors, and during November, this particular week, which is dedicated to seniors as well. Often we refer to them as those that have fought for our freedom and have fought for paving the way to our future. But all too often, every day, there are seniors whose rights, whose dignity, whose quality of life is trampled upon; it’s threatened by negligence and uncaring government bodies, and not only by government but by others as well in the private sector.

For those neglected, abandoned seniors, for those who cannot speak for themselves, we do need someone who represents the seniors. Often we hear grievances from seniors who are frustrated about getting the runaround, and if I may say it more openly, seniors are often jerked around. What is a senior supposed to do? Where is he or she supposed to go when there is a wall: no one to listen, no one to talk to? Well, someone has to speak for our seniors.

I have a large population in my area of York West. I have many more than 15,000, and often I meet with some

of the groups. I have about 11 groups of seniors and I see them on a regular basis. If there is one thing that cries out from those seniors, it is, "Who will be advocating for us?" Often they say, "We seem to be the forgotten ones. We have given so much, yet we receive so little."

Seniors need help; they need a voice. The current Ontario Ombudsman does not have the authority to examine an individual senior's abuse complaint and is only required to make sure that the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care action hotline follows the proper procedure in its investigative capacity. The seniors' abuse hotline is a great idea as a referral service, but it does not investigate cases of abuse. The seniors' info line is a great resource, but it does not necessarily handle complaints and may refer them to other departments, ministries etc., making the process complicated for seniors.

The Ontario Retirement Communities Association, better known as ORCA, only investigates private, long-term-care grievances. It is a problem. How is a senior supposed to know which number to call, and how many calls do they need to make, especially when they are in distress? We, not even ourselves—we are too familiar with the computer world nowadays. Imagine our seniors when they try to call someone and they are told, from telephone to telephone, from call to call, to call so-and-so, push this button, go here and go there. I think it's pathetic, the way we treat our seniors.

There are some saying, "Let's not re-create; let's not duplicate. Let the Ontario Ombudsman look after seniors' complaints." You know, members of the House, I would love to have that. I think the Ontario Ombudsman—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Give him the authority.

Mr. Mario Sergio: Give him the authority; wonderful. I hope that the member from—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: You guys are in charge.

Mr. Mario Sergio: Yes, indeed. I hope that indeed the members on the other side will be supporting this bill and that it will go through, and that there is a recommendation that this House will give the Ombudsman the authority to deal as well with seniors' issues. I do hope that I will have their support, that seniors in our province will have their support and that indeed Mr. Marin, the Ontario Ombudsman, will be allowed, will be given the authority to do exactly that.

I'm not here to re-create another level, if you will, of bureaucracy, or more money—no. I'm interested in having someone who will be speaking for, who will protect the interests, the rights and the dignity of our seniors in Ontario. Therefore, this is my message today.

I'm glad that the member is saying, "Let the Ombudsman do it." Absolutely, but there is a way of doing it. It would be very easy to say to my leader, to the party, to the House, "Let's just do it." Well, do you know what? I think the seniors' representatives who are here today would love to see someone from this House say, "We're going to do it either today or tomorrow," and somebody gets up on that side and says, "Let's move third reading as well." I would love that.

I think we tend to use the seniors when it's convenient for us—at election time, perhaps? Oh, we all love those seniors' community centres and whatever groups—we all love them. But you know how easily we forget them, and it's very unfortunate.

I remember a good, old friend of mine from the old days on North York city council: Mr. Irving Chapley. Some of you in this House know him very well. During a particular debate on community issues and seniors, he did say, "We're doing well. We're doing so much. But you know, if there is one that we leave behind, then we have not completely done our job." I'm calling on the members of this House today. I believe that out of the two million or so seniors who we have in the province of Ontario, if there is 1% who are not receiving the benefits that they are entitled to, where their dignity is being infringed upon, then I believe that we are not doing our job. One per cent of two million would be 2,000 seniors. Don't you think that we should be looking at the interests of those 2,000 seniors as well? Unless we do that, then it means we are not doing the job we are supposed to do.

You can't say everything about seniors in 10 minutes. I can appreciate that, and the members, I'm sure, know that. But I think the message is quite clear: Unless we initiate something, nothing happens, my friends. Unless we initiate something, the seniors cannot receive any action from their own government.

So I hope that today we send a strong message to the government, to everybody else, and say, "Yes, let's push it through, let's send it to a committee and let's hear our seniors." I hope that whatever recommendations come from such a body, one of them would be either a seniors' ombudsman—or why can't we have the Ombudsman of Ontario look after the needs of our seniors? If that is the case, God bless the politicians who have embraced the call and are willing to look after the seniors of Ontario.

I think they deserve our attention, not only three times a year, during the month of November or June or during a particular week such as this week here; I think seniors deserve our attention on a daily basis. If we fail to do that, then it means we haven't finished our job. I hope today we can begin to deliver on our services to our seniors.

1410

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I must say, with great respect to my honourable friend, that it's a shame when a member of the backbench on the government side has to use his time for private members' business when this inequity could be rectified with the stroke of a pen by the Premier. But let me speak to the issues that he brings up and let me speak to what I support and what I don't support.

Here's what I support. First of all, I want to address the spirit of the private member's bill, which is indeed very positive, and I support it. I'm in full agreement with the member for York West in that seniors are entitled to an ombudsman to oversee their fair treatment. They are amongst the least capable in our society of speaking for

themselves. They have a friend in my friend from York West and they have a friend in me. There is a current gap in oversight of seniors' issues which I believe the member for York West is seeking to address with this private member's bill, the Seniors' Ombudsman Act. I commend him for it because when it comes to people living in long-term-care facilities in Ontario, there is really a gap in oversight, which I'll address more fully as I continue to speak.

Seniors have earned our protection, and as this House knows, there are some of us—my friend and I included—who truly care. Seniors are the people who built Ontario, they took care of this province, they took care of us and it's our turn now to take care of them. And why don't we? We do indeed already have an Ombudsman, but that's where this oversight gap exists.

I applaud the member for recognizing seniors as the fastest-growing demographic, especially in Ontario. He and I will be members of that cohort very shortly, I believe. Making provisions to address the challenges they face is the responsible thing to do. We must do what we can to make sure that seniors maintain their independence. They have the right to make their own choices about their future, their care and their finances. A few months ago, I proposed my own private member's bill that would do just that, and I proposed that we implement a province-wide property tax deferral system to allow seniors to remain in their homes longer—and we haven't seen or heard the last of that one either. I'm disappointed that, despite support from members of both opposition parties, the Liberal MPPs voted against my proposal. I hope for more support on seniors' issues from the Liberal members in the future. In fact, they'll likely vote for this bill, and that's fine.

Here's why I cannot support Bill 102 today: because it's about duplication and red tape. We have a provincial Ombudsman now. I have a letter dated October 14, written to my colleague the member from Dufferin-Caledon, in which André Marin, the Ombudsman of Ontario, says:

"In response to your question, there is currently an oversight gap when it comes to the care of seniors in long-term-care homes in Ontario. Many other provinces provide their ombudsmen with the authority to investigate issues relating to long-term care. Since I took office in 2005, I have been calling for modernization of my office's mandate, including adding the authority to investigate long-term-care homes."

Also, the bill provides for an insufficient mandate. It's limited to public agencies only, and it involves—as he himself pointed out—additional expenditure, which means increasing the bureaucracy and increasing spending at a time when we can ill afford to do that.

As far as duplication and red tape are concerned, I myself, as members of this House know, consider seniors' issues a priority. While I support the intent and the spirit of Bill 102, as I've mentioned, I disagree with the proposed method of implementing this idea. The best service we can provide to our citizens is to enforce the

laws already in place and to use the agencies of the government to their fullest capacity, and that includes the Ombudsman of Ontario.

You fix a squeaky wheel; you don't reinvent a squeaky wheel. We already have in place a framework which can incorporate the intent of this private member's bill. It is called the Ombudsman of Ontario. Investigation of seniors' issues, services, complaints and so forth should be conducted by someone who already exists—not by somebody whom we invent to duplicate that service. We should expand the mandate of our Ombudsman, not duplicate his office. How do we do that? An amendment to the act creating the office of the Ombudsman, allowing for what the member from York West proposes. No need for additional red tape, and I would be happy to support that.

Bill 102 does not make a case for why the oversight for seniors can't be conducted by the office of the Ombudsman of Ontario once his mandate has been expanded accordingly, and I suspect that my friend agrees with what I'm saying. There is no reason why seniors' complaints, or decisions and recommendations made by public agencies, should not be investigated by the Ombudsman. After all, why was that office created in the first place, if not to look into any complaint by any citizen of the province, old, young or in between?

As for the mandate being limited to public agencies only, Bill 102 talks about the oversight of public agencies only, which essentially are meaningless provincial bodies. It doesn't address the issues of real people on a one-off basis. Does this mean, then, that allegations of abuse in a privately run seniors' facility, for example, would not be investigated? I feel that public and private facilities have to be held equally accountable. The answer here is an amendment to the original act creating the provincial Ombudsman's office.

As for the question of additional spending, which is, to say the least, timely in the context of what we've heard in the past 24 hours, we know that the government is breaking their election promises and telling Ontarians that they have to tighten their belts as a result of the deficit they've created. Private member's Bill 102, while not contemplated to be that way by the member for York West, perhaps, does not directly specify the funds required for setting up a seniors' ombudsman's office, but there is no doubt that funds are involved. I hope that as responsible and thoughtful members of this House we recognize that it would indeed require the expenditure of such funds to cover, at minimum, salaries for staff, pensions, benefits and overhead costs.

These are factors that Bill 102 does not address. How much would this cost Ontario's taxpayers and where would this money come from? We don't know. I fully support oversight of seniors' issues by an ombudsman, and while I think that Bill 102 is well intended, I feel that it is unnecessary to create a duplicate ombudsman's office. I would support an expansion of the current mandate of the already-existing Ontario Ombudsman to include seniors' issues and I would work with my friend to effect that. That way, we would ensure the protection

of our seniors, appropriate oversight would exist and we would utilize taxpayers' money better and existing government bodies more effectively.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's an honour and a privilege to stand and speak on behalf of seniors in the province of Ontario. First, let me say that we are the only province in Canada that does not have Ombudsman oversight of our long-term-care facilities and hospitals. I also want to point out the obvious: We have a majority Liberal government in this place. Another bit of obvious data is that we, as New Democrats, have introduced a bill every single year, most recently through our health critic France Gélinas last June, asking that oversight be extended to André Marin, our current and existing Ombudsman for long-term care and hospitals. This was voted against by the majority party in the seats opposite.

We, on this side of the floor, cannot override them. We simply do not have the power. So I find it passing strange when the member for York West stands up and says two things. He says, first of all, that he's supporting his own bill, but his own bill calls for a separate seniors' ombudsman—a separate seniors' ombudsman, I might point out, without many teeth in his mouth, because it's very unclear whether this seniors' ombudsman, according to the bill as it's written, would really be able to investigate the over 200 complaints that they receive from private facilities, from long-term-care facilities etc. That's what the bill says.

And then he stands up and says, "Well, you know, either my bill"—or "your bill," in essence—"or have André Marin take on this added responsibility." I also heard from our member for Thornhill. We're all on the same page, here, it sounds like. So the question is, where's the action? Why does the Liberal majority government not want to act in the best interests of seniors and extend the jurisdiction of André Marin, our more than capable and current Ombudsman, to long-term-care facilities and hospitals? Even André Marin calls for that. It would be much, much less costly and much more efficient and it would get the job done.

I'm a United Church minister by trade. This is my third career, actually: first, in business, then in United Church ministry and now here. I spent most of the better part of 12 years in and out of long-term-care facilities and retirement homes visiting our seniors. I can tell you first-hand what goes on in those places, as I'm sure you can, representing seniors across Ontario. We have seen first-hand the overwork of the staff, the understaffing of the places and the lack of government funds. Over and over and over again, we in the New Democratic Party have called for sweeping changes to our long-term-care facilities, including, and primarily, increased care per client of at least 3.5 hours per day. We have called for that repeatedly; we have yet to see the government move on that.

1420
Certainly, calling for an Ombudsman is part of that. We see two-tier care in Ontario. We see care for those

who can afford it, much better care. Then, we see care for those who can't afford much better care and it's not much better; in fact, it's much worse in many instances. I and many of those who wander in and out of long-term-care facilities see that. My own uncle died from C. difficile. He was a senior at the time. He was moved from long-term care into a hospital, where he died, and the Ombudsman did not have the authority to investigate that death or any of the other deaths of C. difficile victims in our hospitals.

How long do we have to put up with this current state of affairs, a state of affairs that is only in place in Ontario? When will this government act?

I understand that the member is doing his best. He is trying to convince, clearly, a cabinet that is not in favour of what's best for seniors to make a little turn to the light and actually do what's right. He's standing up. He's presenting a bill. It's not the ideal circumstance, we don't think. We think that André Marin could do the job, clearly, and so does the member from Thornhill; extend his jurisdiction. But at least he's trying, which is more than I can say for the majority of the cabinet across there and Premier McGuinty himself, because clearly, we see that if something is going to happen it has to come from the Premier's office in this province, and it clearly is not.

You know, it really is one of the stranger moments, I have to say, standing here and listening to the member from York West speaking both for his bill and against it in the same breath, both for his bill and for our bill in the same breath, and challenging us to support it. The reality is, even if we did, unless Premier McGuinty and the cabinet wants to do what's right for seniors in this province, it won't get done. That's the reality. Certainly, as you've heard on this side of the floor, we in the New Democrats want to see that happen. We've been wanting to see that happen ever since I was elected, and way before I was elected we've wanted to see that happen. André Marin—I don't know what kind of card, in terms of party affiliation, he carries in his back pocket, but he wants to see it happen. Everybody, it seems, wants to see this happen except the Liberal cabinet, the Premier of Ontario and de facto the Liberal Party.

So again, I stand here; my colleague will speak to this as well and I'm going to leave him some minutes to do so. Yes, of course we want to see Ombudsman oversight of long-term care. We want to see Ombudsman oversight of hospitals. We want what's best for seniors. We want to increase the care in long-term-care homes. We want to do that. We've put forward legislation. Time and time again, it's been voted down, and here we hear a private member's bill, which, quite frankly, will go nowhere unless it has cabinet approval, which it clearly doesn't have.

So why are we here? Why are we wasting taxpayers' dollars yet again debating something that won't go forward? Good question—something to ask Premier McGuinty himself.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: First, let me congratulate the member from York West for his foresight to introduce Bill 102, An Act to establish the Seniors' Ombudsman.

I heard the member quite clearly when he said that he would not mind if the authority of the Ombudsman were expanded or extended to be the Ombudsman for seniors as well. That means he thinks, when it goes before committee, whether it's the Conservatives or the NDP, they will support this bill and make some changes. That's the process and that's how it works.

So I would reiterate what the member for York West says: that he has identified a problem. No doubt, he has identified a problem.

What we have said earlier is that as a government, we don't fear that the Ombudsman makes investigations; in fact, we welcome investigations by the Ombudsman. Why? Look what happened just recently. The Ombudsman made a very important decision to look into the matter of taxation and assessment. He made a number of recommendations; I think there were over 22 recommendations. Our government looked at these recommendations and acted on the vast majority of these recommendations. That should be the case, as well, with the Ombudsman's recommendations when he looks at the seniors' issues, when he gets authority to do that as well.

So here is a member who takes not only his time, but he's got it in his heart to help seniors out. And what does he get around here? Instead of all of us saying we should support this member from York West because he means well, he has listened to everybody, he has listened to CARP and the seniors' associations, he's coming before the House, and he's introducing a private member's bill—yes, and you may have a point. I suppose if the cabinet wanted to, they could do that overnight. Nevertheless, all these things take time. This is a process. Why do we have private members' hours in the first place, if he is being denied the opportunity to present Bill 102 in this House?

He said very clearly that he doesn't want to establish a new Ombudsman. He says what he wants to do or what one of the options would be, obviously, is to expand the authority of the Ombudsman. Okay. You agree; the Conservatives agree, as well. So he says, "Let's move forward and let's then see what the government will do." Isn't that what you want to do? Isn't that what we're here for, to ensure these bills get speedy approval? And what does he challenge the opposition to do? He says, "Well, first reading, second reading, third reading—do it." He says, "Let's move on this." Oh, no, he's being criticized. I want all the kids to know, and I want all of you who listen to this debate to know, that here we have the opposition, instead of saying, "You know what? This is great. Let's move and let's see what the Premier will do. Let's see what the government will do. Let's see how fast the government will act"—that should be your stand, not to be critical of this bill.

Mr. Peter Shurman: We're doing our job. Why don't you do yours?

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Look, I've introduced some other bills in this Legislature. I have had some seniors

come to my office, and they complained about restraints, they complained about the food, they complained about credit cards being stolen, and they asked what we're going to do about this, and they complained about issues that they have in fact brought before this very member here.

So it is very clear to me: If there is a will in this House—the member has brought forth this private member's Bill 102—the opposition could agree with it, and we could move in the right direction.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I do appreciate the opportunity to add my comments on Bill 102, and I would start out, again, by commending the member from York West for bringing this matter forward. This is an important issue, and there is no question that vulnerable seniors need more protection that can only be provided, in some senses, by this place. There is no question that, on a daily basis, there is significant physical, emotional, mental and financial abuse of seniors going on out there. I can tell you from my years in private practice as a lawyer and even from my time here from people coming in to see me in my community office that some of the things that are being done to seniors, especially in the financial sense, would curl your hair. It's unbelievable, and there's a lot, I believe, that we should be doing.

I do commend you for bringing this forward, because this is an important issue in terms of gaining jurisdiction for seniors, at least with respect to long-term-care facilities and facilities being run by the province. However, I can sense the frustration as the honourable member is discussing it with us, because he's trying to do indirectly what he can't do directly, which is bring forward the amendment to the Ombudsman Act that will allow the Ombudsman to get involved in the first place. So he's forced to bring it forward as a private member's bill to bring forward a seniors' ombudsman. There's clearly a reason why we can't support that aspect of it, because it means setting up an entirely new bureaucracy to deal with something that a simple amendment to the Ombudsman Act could deal with. Everyone who has commented on that in this place agrees that the Ombudsman should have jurisdiction to investigate these kinds of complaints and there's no reason why he can't. It's easily done, and I urge all government members to speak to the cabinet and the Premier about that.

1430

Lest there be any mistake about the ability of the Ombudsman to deal with that, it's pretty clear that he is ready, willing and able to speak to that issue and be actively involved—he has asked for that responsibility. If I may, I'd just like to take a brief minute to quote the text of a letter from the Ombudsman to one of my colleagues, the member from Dufferin—Caledon, specifically on the issue of whether he would like to be able to investigate these complaints. I would like to read it in its entirety:

"Dear Ms. Jones,

"Thank you for your letter of October 8, 2008, concerning Bill 102, the Seniors' Ombudsman Act, 2008.

In response to the question you posed, there is currently an oversight gap when it comes to the care of seniors in long-term-care homes in Ontario. Many other provinces provide their Ombudsman with the authority to investigate issues in relation to long-term care. Since I took office in 2005, I have been calling for modernization of my office's mandate, including adding the authority to investigate long-term-care homes.

"While I believe Bill 102 is well-intentioned, it does not really address what I perceive to be the current oversight needs of seniors in Ontario. The provisions of Bill 102 mirror the current Ombudsman Act, which my office operates under. While Bill 102 sets out specific guiding principles addressing the entitlements of seniors in Ontario, the proposed seniors' ombudsman would only have authority to investigate 'public bodies.' Public bodies, as defined by the bill, would only include provincial government bodies. Accordingly, the seniors' ombudsman would have no authority to investigate services provided by private or municipal long-term-care homes.

"Although the definition of 'governmental organization' in the Ombudsman Act differs from the definition of 'public bodies' set out in Bill 102, there is no substantial difference. My office already has the authority to investigate complaints about the organizations covered by Bill 102. The creation of the seniors' Ombudsman would result in duplication of the oversight already available through my office, and would continue to leave private and municipal long-term-care providers beyond the scrutiny of independent investigative oversight.

"I believe that rather than create another legislative office, as proposed by Bill 102, it makes more sense to expand my office's authority to include all long-term-care homes, regardless of whether they are provincially controlled.

"As you may be aware, I am currently investigating the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's monitoring of long-term-care facilities. My office also resolves complaints on behalf of seniors on a daily basis, but at present, we cannot assist seniors by investigating long-term-care service providers."

So there's no question that the Ombudsman is fully capable of taking on this responsibility. We too believe it's badly needed, and we would certainly urge the government to consider this as we move forward into this very important sector, as one step in a much-needed plank of services to protect vulnerable seniors. Thank you for the opportunity today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): With the indulgence of the House, I want to welcome the grade 5 class of Huronia Centennial Public School from Elmvale, and thank their teacher, Mr. Jason Monck, for bringing them to Queen's Park.

Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I really do appreciate the fact that the member from York West is bringing forward this bill. The sentiments are right; we don't dispute the sentiments. We all agree that oversight of these long-term-

care facilities is long overdue. It's for that reason that my colleague from Hamilton Centre introduced a bill two and a half or three years ago, if I recall, saying we need to allow the current Ombudsman to have oversight over these long-term-care facilities. The response from the government has been, "No." There has not been one Liberal who said the initiative by New Democrats to have oversight of these long-term-care facilities was good.

Today, we hear the member from Davenport saying, "Yes, the initiative is a good one." But when we introduced it, it was not. Why was the initiative we introduced not a good one? I'll tell you why. It's not an issue of money; it's an issue of fear. The current Ombudsman has been incredibly effective in the job he has done. When you look at each and every one of the issues he has dealt with, it's a long list, and that would take me a few minutes, but just to name a few:

The report entitled *From Hope to Despair: Whether the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's Refusal to Fund the Drug Cystagon for Treatment of Batten's Disease is Unreasonable and Unfair*—and the government moved quickly.

The report entitled *The Right to be Impatient: Whether the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care Has Failed to Properly Administer Newborn Screening in Ontario*—and the government moved quickly.

The report entitled *Getting it Right: Investigation into the Transparency of the Property Assessment Process and the Integrity and Efficiency of Decision-Making at the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation*. They moved, not as quickly as they wanted to, but they moved. And this year, they moved on all of his recommendations.

The report entitled *Losing the Waiting Game: Investigation into Unreasonable Delay at the Ministry of Community and Social Services' Ontario Disability Support Program's Disability Adjudication Unit*. The government moved—and the list goes on.

The government has moved each and every time the Ombudsman has presented a report. What does it mean? It means he's effective in what he does. The Ombudsman has called for his oversight over long-term-care facilities. The member from Davenport agrees with everything he has done, but didn't agree with the Ombudsman's request to have his oversight over long-term care. Why? It doesn't make any sense. So you'll understand, those of you who are here from the seniors' groups, why we are a bit impatient and a little bit angry when we're dealing with a private member's bill that more or less moves in the direction that we have been moving in for three years.

This is a bill presented by this member, in a similar way that ours was a bill and requires legislative approval by this assembly. Our bill and their bill still require the members of this assembly to vote on it. In the same way that they are going to vote on this bill as it moves to second reading—and I suspect that all the Liberals will support it here, and everyone else—our bill would have meant the same, by way of your approval, to move it through the legislative process. Why would you not agree

to our bill? The reason why you are not agreeing to what we have done is because you are afraid of this Ombudsman and his effectiveness. That is what I put to you as a non-lawyer, and that is what my experience gives me based on the long history that we have here.

Oversight is incredibly important. Seniors are abused on a daily basis and much of it is because of underfunding, because the people that work in those institutions are underpaid and extremely overworked. We haven't dealt with that. Some of it is carelessness and some of it is negligence, but much of it is overwork. The Ombudsman would be yet another person that would get into those institutions and say to the government, "This is what you need to fix."

So we've got a bill; we've had a bill here for years that you could have supported. It's nothing new to you. So I say to you Liberals, please, be a little generous when the opposition introduces something that you're now about to support, which I think is a good idea. But our view is that our bill and the Ombudsman would do a better job.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I am pleased to rise in the House today to support Bill 102 that my colleague from York West has proposed. I would like to thank him for bringing forward this bill because it speaks to so many of the issues that the seniors face. I congratulate him for taking on this important initiative.

The member for York West has talked about how difficult it can be for a senior to know which number to call and how many calls a senior may have to make sometimes, especially when in distress. The sentiment is very familiar to anyone who has contact with seniors on a regular basis. In my household, we are blessed to have my 79-year-old mother living with us and I can relate to what that means.

Seniors can be among the most vulnerable in the community, especially with technology advancing so quickly, and making even a simple phone call can be confusing. A significant number of seniors live in the riding of York South-Weston and they contact my community office for help every day. Many may feel intimidated due to language barriers that make it difficult for them to convey their needs. Perhaps they've lost their husband or their wife, or perhaps their children live far away, so they often might feel ignored or alone. Of course, one would expect any public body or employee to give seniors the best possible treatment; it is our duty to respect and care for the needs of our seniors. They are proud of their lives; they built this country and they worked hard, as the member for York West has pointed out. They've tried to create a home for their families here; they've raised their children here, and because many decide to remain in their homes for as long as possible, it is important that they have access to programs and services that will benefit them and allow them to remain independent.

1440

We've heard that in Ontario seniors make up 13.6% of the population and there are approximately 15,000

seniors per riding. That's the same reality that I have in my riding. Everyone needs a little help, and through our aging at home strategy seniors are receiving more help each day, but seniors must know what services they can take advantage of. Last June, I held a seniors' forum, for example, in York South-Weston to bring information about the services that are available directly to the people they are designed to serve. I heard again and again at this forum stories about the struggles that seniors face every day, and also how happy they were that there were some services and programs that in many cases could help. It is our responsibility to give seniors the support they deserve and to advocate on their behalf when they need us to do so. They must not be forgotten.

I also want to add that we did not support the bill that came forward from the third party because that oversight is in the purview of the Auditor General. That's why we didn't support that. I want to thank the member for York West for bringing this bill forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Leal: Indeed, it's a pleasure for me to make some comments on Bill 102, presented by my colleague Mr. Sergio, the member for York West. This is an interesting bill that he's brought forward to help seniors in Ontario but, more than that, it's a real extension of the member for York West's philosophy during the long time that he's been in public life here in Toronto. I know when he was a councillor in the old city of North York, and indeed during his time on Metro council, he served many constituents. Many of them came to Canada after the First World War, after the Second World War and during the 1950s as the Iron Curtain descended over Europe, as Winston Churchill once described it. Many of these individuals took back-breaking jobs here in Toronto and literally built this community from the ground up. During that time, as they got on in years, during his work as a councillor, they would come to Mr. Sergio and ask him for his assistance to cut through municipal government, to get them access to municipal government services, federal government services and provincial government services. So this bill that we're debating today is really an extension of one's personal philosophy to reach a group of citizens in our community.

I think it has many merits, to really investigate those situations that occur from time to time and in our communities where there has been citizens' abuse. I know I get to tour long-term-care homes in my riding frequently. I chat with Marion Burton, who is the president of Mapleridge senior citizens in Peterborough, and Shirley Shaw, who is the executive director of Activity Haven for seniors in Peterborough. CARP is represented today, and I do chat with Bob Geddes, who is the president of the Peterborough chapter of CARP. When you chat with them about the member for York West's private member's bill, many of them are very much supportive and on board because they're the individuals who are working day in and day out in our communities with our seniors to make sure that they get access to all the services they richly deserve.

We're fairly close to November 11, Remembrance Day, a time when we reflect on those individuals in our communities who often made the supreme sacrifice. Many of them today—we think of our World War II veterans now, who are in their late 80s and early 90s, who are in long-term-care homes, or indeed veterans from the Korean War who are now in their late 70s and early 80s. When you go in, as we all will be doing toward November 11, to chat with them about the sacrifices that they've made and to remind them that we're all here, as legislators, working together in their best interests—and the bill that's presented today, I think, is part and parcel of our commitment and indeed the member from York West's personal commitment to see this initiative go forward.

One of the things that struck me a few years ago was seniors dealing with the Municipal Property Assessment Corp. I remember having a senior phone me, as she had some questions about how they decided upon the value of her property. She phoned the call centre in Pickering, Ontario, to try to get some information, and the person who was on the other end of the line in that call centre talked to this senior about multiple regression analysis in order to determine the value of her property. I bet if we did an interview of the 107 members serving in this House and asked them to define for us what is meant by "multiple regression analysis," many of them would have a hard time with that information.

What the member has proposed today is a seniors' ombudsman to cut through some of that red tape and get answers for our seniors in our communities. The member needs to be applauded; this is a very fine legislative initiative.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The member from York West, Mr. Sergio, has up to two minutes for his response.

Mr. Mario Sergio: I want to thank my colleagues who have participated in the debate: the members from Peterborough, York South–Weston, Trinity–Spadina, Davenport, Parkdale–High Park, and of course Thornhill. One thing has come out very loud and clear: "Yes, there is a problem; yes, something should be done; yes, seniors are entitled; and I totally agree with you." You totally agree with the intent of the bill.

It seems that we have this notwithstanding clause that always grabs the best of this House and somehow holds back our very best. That's okay; I understand that. This is the way the wheels spin politically in the House. But there is one particular thing that we seem to agree on: Something has to be done.

To the members from Parkdale–High Park and Trinity–Spadina there, we are not dealing with the government today. We are dealing with seniors' issues, seniors' interests, and if you keep on saying why, why, why—there is a particular moment in time when action is required. Today is one of those moments when we can force the arms of the government, if you will, into the next stage, into the next action. I'm saying today, let's move this forward, let's go to the committee so you can

hear not only from the representatives who are here today, but others as well. And where are we going to send it? If it's going to the Ontario Ombudsman, wonderful. I didn't say that this should not be done. Wonderful.

There is a gap; let's bridge it. Let's give the seniors the representation, the care, the attention, that they need. I hope that today we can initiate that to move on and give the seniors the dignity and respect that they deserve.

I thank all the members for their support.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The time for this ballot item has expired. For those of you watching in the galleries and those at home, we will vote on this item in 100 minutes.

Orders of the day.

REPRESENTATION AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA REPRÉSENTATION ÉLECTORALE

Mr. Hoy moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 104, An Act to amend the Representation Act, 2005 / Projet de loi 104, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2005 sur la représentation électorale.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order 97, Mr. Hoy, you have up to 12 minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Pat Hoy: I'm pleased to bring forward Bill 104, An Act to amend the Representation Act, 2005. We're here for second reading debate.

I want to make clear at the outset that the amendment to that Representation Act, 2005, is indeed a piece of Ontario Legislature legislation.

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That being said, the reason for the amendment would be to rename the riding of Chatham–Kent–Essex to Chatham–Kent–Leamington. This is about identity and it's about being correct.

We often talk about identity theft in this chamber and elsewhere. We talk about protecting one's identity. I think this is part and parcel of what I'm trying to do here. If there was ever a group of people assembled who wanted their name to be spelled correctly or pronounced correctly when we read it through the press or in other instances, it might be us. So people want their names to be spelled right. They want that recognition of their identity directly to them. That's why I think we need, in part, to change the name of the riding to Chatham–Kent–Leamington and give the recognition to Leamington that it so well deserves. I'm very proud and honoured to be the provincial member of Parliament for Chatham–Kent–Essex, and I seek this name change.

There is a county of Essex, and that county of Essex consists of LaSalle, Tecumseh, Lakeshore, Amherstburg, Essex, Kingsville and Leamington. Leamington is one of seven municipalities within the county of Essex. There has always been confusion because there is a county of

Essex, a town of Essex, the federal riding named Essex and the provincial riding named Essex. Also, by having Essex in the riding name, it implies that I represent all of Essex. Many people unfamiliar with the riding boundaries do not know that the Essex portion that I represent is Leamington, and it's a wonderful municipality for anyone to represent.

Leamington is at the most southerly latitude of Canada. It shares the 42nd parallel with Rome, Italy, and northern California. It enjoys early springs, warm summers and the longest growing season in eastern Canada. Leamington enjoys the greatest number of sunshine hours of any municipality in Canada—over 2,000 hours, according to Agriculture Canada. That is why Leamington is known as the sun parlour of Canada.

This combination of favourable climate and rich soils permits Leamington growers to produce a wider range of crops than elsewhere in Canada. This is aided by the second-warmest climate in Canada, after the lower mainland of British Columbia. Fruit and vegetable stands line the roads leading to Leamington and within.

Highway 77 and Highway 3 provide access to Highway 401. Leamington is just 45 minutes from the Windsor-Detroit international border. There is a ferry service to and from Pelee Island and Sandusky, Ohio. It runs from April through November for tourist travel as well as the movement of agricultural commodities and business travel.

Leamington also has a private commercial airport and a public transit system. The Leamington District Memorial Hospital and the Leamington family health team provide quality health care service to a population of almost 30,000 residents. There are three high schools and eight elementary schools. Leamington Police Service has 39 sworn officers and 21 full- and part-time civilians policing the entire municipality of Leamington, in the former Mersea township, covering 262 square kilometres.

The Uptown Leamington Business Improvement Area represents over 200 businesses in uptown Leamington. Note that all the entities I have mentioned here this afternoon contain the name "Leamington," and there are many more within the municipality that I could have cited. Leamington should have special recognition for the people who live there, for the work they do and for their being a municipality.

Leamington is known as the tomato capital of Canada. Many people recognize this when I tell them that I represent Chatham-Kent-Essex, and I quickly say "Leamington." Tomatoes are Leamington's largest greenhouse vegetable crop, supplying supermarkets across North America. It is also the home of the Heinz food processing plant, the largest employer in Leamington. They use field tomatoes, not to be confused with greenhouse tomatoes.

In 1909, H.J. Heinz decided to expand to Canada and set up manufacturing operations at a factory in Leamington. The Leamington operation first started processing pickles, vinegars and beans. In 1910, it produced its first

bottle of ketchup, and two years later, started to make cooked spaghetti. Soups joined the production line in 1917, and juices and Heinz baby foods followed in 1930.

I wonder how many people know that Heinz baby food started so many, many decades ago. It's been food to many children throughout Ontario and indeed North America.

The H.J. Heinz plant employs 780 people, and another 330 people are hired for the very hectic harvest season, which is ongoing now. The farmers who grow the field tomatoes for the Heinz plant grow 280,000 tonnes of tomatoes, or half of all the processed tomatoes grown in the province of Ontario.

I was told some years ago, during a tour of the Heinz plant, that their tonnes per acre grown in Leamington exceed the tonnage per acre of California. They're very competitive in Leamington when it comes to tonnage and the production of their foods.

Leamington, with this great tomato history and background, celebrates its tomato legacy each year with an annual summertime fest. The tourist information booth downtown is shaped like a ripe tomato. The water tower—you can guess—is shaped and coloured as a giant tomato. Stompin' Tom Connors mentions Leamington in his tune The Ketchup Song.

Leamington has the largest number of commercial greenhouses in all of North America. The principal greenhouse crops include tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers and flowers, and there are over a thousand acres under cover—innovations by owners and growers.

Greenhouse production in Leamington is a thriving, billion-dollar business. Some of the members have taken part when some of the Leamington growers have come here, and we have seen their flowers and vegetables many times. The combination of fertile soils, water temperature and longer daylight hours allow Leamington to support a variety of other crops.

I want to let you know—and I've mentioned in the House before—that Leamington was named by Money-Sense as the number one place to live in the country of Canada. It was up against Montreal, for example, and British Columbia. Leamington was found to be the best place in all of the Dominion of Canada to live.

My good friend and colleague the member from Essex has lived in Leamington for many years, and it's still home to Joan and Bruce Crozier.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: Then again, too many to mention.

Mr. Pat Hoy: I'm sure he can attest to how wonderful Leamington is.

I have a letter from the mayor of Leamington, Mayor John Adams, who wrote to me in this regard. He said:

"I am pleased to offer my support to your private member's bill requesting the current riding name of Chatham-Kent-Essex be changed to Chatham-Kent-Leamington.

"The current name implies that you represent all people in Essex county, rather than just Leamington.

Having the town of Essex in Essex county additionally compounds this confusion.

"We are pleased and proud that you represent the municipality of Leamington at Queen's Park and feel that changing the riding name to Chatham-Kent-Leamington would help make the riding boundaries more identifiable."

Leamington, beyond its agriculture, is also known as Ontario's southernmost recreational playground, bordered by Lake Erie to the south. A shipwreck diving area offers fascinating insight into the rich nautical history of our area. Local dive shops and charter operations fully service the industry, providing lessons, equipment, rentals and excursions. Non-diver excursions are available both in water and on land, for those who don't wish to dive.

Each summer, Leamington's municipal marina draws thousands of boaters and tourists. Naturalists from around the world come to witness the spectacular migration of birds and butterflies to this most southerly point of mainland Canada. Local winery and greenhouse tours are also a must to see. Tourists are never disappointed when visiting Canada's most southerly point, Leamington.

1500

Including Leamington as part of the riding name will give it the special recognition that it deserves. It will identify the geographic boundaries of what is currently Chatham-Kent-Essex more correctly, and it just makes a lot of sense and will eliminate confusion.

I ask for all-member support in this regard and support the 30,000 people who live in this most blessed municipality, Leamington, Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Further debate? The member for Oxford.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know it may take you some time to recognize me, but it did come. We very much appreciate that.

It is a privilege to be able to get up and speak to Bill 104, put forward by the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex, soon, hopefully, to become the member from Chatham-Kent-Leamington if this bill gets royal assent. I think it's a credit to the member for bringing this bill forward.

There's not a lot to say about the bill that hasn't just been said by the member presenting the bill. I would just point out to those who are watching as we speak here that the bill, as the Speaker would know, is covered on one page, and in fact it only needs to cover half the page, because this member isn't trying to change his community. As he said about his community, nothing much in the community needs to be changed, because obviously, in his presentation, it was the number one community in Ontario. I'm here to agree with him that it's one of the best two in Ontario. We very much appreciate his support for his local community. I won't dwell much on what the other one of the two would be.

As I said, the bill is rather short:

"The Representation Act, 2005 is amended by adding the following section: ...

"2.1 Despite anything in section 2 to the contrary, the electoral district of Chatham-Kent-Essex is hereby renamed the electoral district of Chatham-Kent-Leamington."

In fact, the next section is that it will come into force the day of royal assent, and that the short title of this act is the Representation Amendment Act, 2008. That is the entirety of the bill.

I want to say that I support the bill. As I've got some notes on the bill, there were a couple of things that I just wanted to address and only one that I would take some exception to.

First of all, I want to say that not only do I represent a community that is not only similar but is as nice a community or one of the nicer communities in Ontario, we also have in common that Tom Connors wrote a song about our riding too. In fact, some of you may remember the song about Tillsonburg: "My back still aches when I hear that word"—because of our tobacco industry. In fact, it was quite a popular song. I notice now that the member spoke about Tom Connors writing a song about the tomatoes in Leamington.

One thing I wanted to just talk about for a moment is that one of the reasons for the name change that the member put in his explanation for the bill was to give Leamington the recognition it deserves. I know that clarity, for people to understand the boundaries of a riding, is very important, but that is not what gives communities the recognition they deserve.

Now, remember, Mr. Speaker, that a lot of the names of our ridings are based on the boundaries of the upper-tier government or, in the former government—under the Baldwin Act, the county form of government. Of course, Leamington was in the county of Essex and was a lower tier in the county of Essex. So as part of Essex county, it's not unreasonable to assume that the person who represented it would be representing Essex county.

If we go back not that many years, this riding would have been Chatham, which was a single-tier municipality, Kent which was the area around Chatham, and that part of Essex that was Leamington was the other upper-tier municipality that was involved in that riding, so it made a lot of sense to call it Chatham-Kent-Essex. But when you leave that county of Kent and make it part of the single-tier municipality of Chatham-Kent and put that hyphen in there, then all of a sudden, it starts to make one wonder how Kent and Essex are still involved in the name of this riding, because the only part of the upper-tier municipality of Essex that's part of this member's riding would be the village of Leamington. There's absolutely no reason why you couldn't procure a definition. Take the word "Leamington" and put that on the end of Chatham-Kent-Leamington, and then leave it to the other riding to be called Essex and whatever it may be connected to. But because of the number of municipalities that were listed, I think, by the member—the municipality of LaSalle, Tecumseh, Lakeshore, Amherstburg, the town of Essex, Kingsville, and Leamington, of course, is the one that we're speaking about. All those other municipalities are in the county of Essex, and in a

riding that also uses the name "Essex" in the riding, I do believe. I stand to be corrected, but I believe that the member from Essex also used that name, so it makes a lot of sense.

The one challenge that I think we do face, and I'm sure that the member has looked into it, is the issue of the riding's name being similar both federally and provincially. I think it's very important that we don't confuse the issue by having the same riding at the two levels of government. It may not be confusing for those who represent it, but it could very well be quite confusing to the people in the municipality, that they have a different name for the riding provincially as they do federally. I would hope that the member would talk to the federal member to also work on getting the name changed, so that in both jurisdictions, we would have the same name.

The one other thing, again, that I wanted to—the reason I brought up the issue of giving Leamington the recognition they deserve: I don't want to stand here in support of the bill based on that principal, because that would somehow mean that the city of Woodstock, the town of Tillsonburg, the town of Ingersoll, the municipality of Zorra, the municipality of East Zorra-Tavistock, the township of Blandford-Blenheim, the township of Norwich and the township of South-West Oxford all didn't deserve recognition because the riding I represent is the riding of Oxford.

The reason I say the riding of Oxford is that one of the biggest challenges I face in my riding is when I go to events and they have the program printed up, and the program will say, "Ernie Hardeman, the MPP for the county of Oxford." In fact, we all know that the county is the jurisdiction of local government. I don't believe that there's anyone in the Legislature with a riding that has the word "county" in the title of the riding. I represent the riding of Oxford, not the county of Oxford. The county of Oxford is represented by county council; the riding of Oxford is represented by the MPP at Queen's Park. I think it's very important to point that out, but I think it's ever more important to point out that I think that the recognition of my local municipalities, all those which I named, are local municipalities in the county of Oxford, and that they all deserve to have the same recognition as the town of Leamington before or after this change.

But again, I want to commend the member for bringing this forward and I want to say that I don't know about others in this House, but I will be supporting this bill when it comes for a vote.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'm delighted to rise. It was delightful, actually, to hear all about the member's area of jurisdiction. I second the member from Oxford in saying that the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex, soon to be Chatham-Kent-Leamington—I was particularly struck by the fact that Tom Connors mentions Leamington, which I didn't know, in his tune The Ketchup Song. That's pretty cool. It does sound like a beautiful area. Certainly, his passion came through when he talked about

his area of jurisdiction, and I think it's a passion that we all feel when talking about our own ridings, or should feel, because that's why we're here, after all, to represent our constituency.

I was impressed with the mayor's letter too, and his explanation, which helped me in terms of why this bill came forward—just the confusion factor. Also, again, to second the member from Oxford, to prevent confusion, it would be very handy if the member did speak to his federal counterpart because he wouldn't want two names for the same riding federally and provincially. Hopefully, he'll act on that recommendation, which I believe is a good one.

1510

I would simply ask about process. I think that here in this House, we all know how rare it is and what a rare delight it is to be able to bring forward a private member's bill and have it debated in second reading. It's something that happens very rarely for any member here. It seems to me somewhat sad that this member has to use that opportunity for something that seems so pro forma, something that seems like an exercise that could have been done very quickly and perhaps at the beginning of the legislative session, instead of having to take 45 minutes to do it with his private member's bill slot. I would hope that for other bills like this where everybody is going to agree—and on what grounds would you disagree, particularly when the mayor is in support of this and the folks of his community and riding seem to be in support of this? Instead of taking 45 minutes to talk about it, and give the opposition a chance to talk about it, why could this not have been done, again, very quickly and easily simply by a government motion?

We're all aware here, particularly in these times, of tax dollars and the way they're spent in this place, and also just aware of the member's time and the fact that maybe there's another burning issue that he would have liked to have spent his private member's bill time on rather than a simple name change. Surely, simple name changes can be handled in a different way.

In the interest of not prolonging this, I'm going to cede to another member of our caucus in case he wants to say a few words. But without a doubt we all support this, and Godspeed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Bruce Crozier: I'm pleased to rise today to support my colleague from Chatham-Kent-Essex in his bid to make the name of his riding more clear. I'm pleased to do that for a number of reasons. One of those, and not all of you might know this in here, is: Mr. Hoy is my member of provincial Parliament because I happen to live in Leamington. The reason I live in Leamington and represent the riding of Essex is, in 1999, as many of you know, the boundaries changed. I had represented Leamington from 1993 to 1999 and I've lived there all my life. Joan and I raised our family there, so I continue to live there. In fact, I tell the other municipalities in the riding of Essex that I can represent each of them better

that way because I have no bias for any one particular municipality.

But a name is important. We're all identified by name. That's how people know us. In fact, in this place, on certain occasions we can use our surnames, but most of the time we are identified by our riding name, and that's the way it should be. I think that the proposal from my friend from Chatham-Kent is one that will make more clear the communities that he represents, because after all he represents two communities: Chatham-Kent and Leamington. How much better can you get than to have the name "Leamington" identify his riding?

These riding names are kind of strange. For example, prior to a year or so ago, the now finance minister was the member for Windsor-St. Clair, and yet he represented the town of Tecumseh, or almost all of it. I represented a little chunk of Tecumseh as well. So there are some confusing boundaries around. That one got changed, so now the Minister of Finance represents all of the town of Tecumseh. They went from having two members represent them to one.

Names are important. I know that my colleague Mr. Hoy gave you a lot of information about a great town. There are lots of great towns in this province, and we could all stand up and have a lot of good things to say about the community in which we live. But before I got to this place in 1993—and again, some of you may not know—I was the mayor of Leamington at the time. I had been mayor from 1988 to 1993 and I had been on Leamington council from 1985 to 1988 as a councillor. So you would think I would automatically agree with my colleague, in that this name change will, I think, identify his riding the way it should be identified. And I agree: I think that if this bill proceeds and passes and becomes provincial law, I, along with Mr. Hoy and others, encourage the federal member to do the same thing, and then there would be no further name—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: To debate.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: —to debate. Thank you.

So I support Mr. Hoy. Thank you very much for listening to me. Good day.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to rise today in support of Bill 104, An Act to amend the Representation Act, brought forward by the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex, who has done a great job of articulating the reasons why the name change would need to occur, to rename the riding from Chatham-Kent-Essex to Chatham-Kent-Leamington. He provided maps, did his research and has certainly got the support of the mayor of Leamington, John Adams.

There has been a question here by my colleague from the third party about working with the federal member, because as we know, the federal Parliament decides the boundaries and the names, and then as changes need to occur, we try to work together as two levels of government to do that. So I want to say "congratulations" to the federal member of Parliament, the newly re-elected member, Dave Van Kesteren, on his re-election.

I'm sure the member will be talking to him, if he hasn't already. Certainly the arguments you put forward make absolute sense, which we sometimes enjoy in private members' business, I can say, on Thursdays. Sometimes it's just not quite as partisan and we can agree on certain levels. So I certainly appreciate private members' time when we can talk, sometimes logically, about things that should be done.

I know that the member from Peterborough is here. Certainly when you talk about riding names, my riding is quite a lengthy name: Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. I actually live in Peterborough county and have three pieces of Peterborough county, and the member from Peterborough has the city of Peterborough and three other pieces of Peterborough county. I'm not promoting that my riding name becomes longer, but just in the whole boundary issues and especially when we have larger geographical rural ridings, it becomes a challenge to be so inclusive. We share school boards and health units—and we can go on on that.

I enjoyed reading more about Leamington. My colleague from Oxford tells me that he's actually taken a plane ride over the area to see all—I mean, I think he'd have to see the aerial view to see all the thousands of acres of greenhouses that are there. That's fabulous. I didn't know it was the sun parlour of Canada. I always like sunshine; it always makes everybody feel better.

The statistics he brought out about Leamington were quite fascinating. I know our lives are very busy here, and we don't get to see all the information that goes on in the province of Ontario, or to sit back and actually take in all the facts. The member has gone on at length, and as the member from Oxford did say, "It's hard to repeat what has already been said," other than the fact that both my riding and the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex, as it stands now, share a great agricultural base, which we are pleased to support and encourage.

I would just say that changing the name from Chatham-Kent-Essex to Chatham-Kent-Leamington—that's how we hope we will address the member in the near future, if we can get all the mechanics of politics and Legislatures moving together.

Applause.

Ms. Laurie Scott: My colleague is clapping. So with those comments, you have our full support.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Normally, I like to use up all of my time; I really do. And sometimes I just don't have enough in order to be able to say what I want to say. But on this one, it's going to be short. I want to say to the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex that I support your bill. The mayor supports your bill. There appears to be no opposition. The federal law allows you to make an amendment to the riding by way of a name change, and therefore I'm just going to say that I support it.

1520

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I am pleased to take the opportunity this afternoon to get a few words on the record to support Bill 104, from my friend the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex, to change its name to Chatham-Kent-Leamington.

Thank goodness we have great people who work in our legislative library, because this afternoon they were able to get me a great book called Leamington's Heritage, 1874-1974. It's interesting what you get to know when you take a quick glance at a book that looks at this history. I didn't know that Leamington and Mersea township early in the 17th century was settled by French voyageurs and missionaries who paddled along the north shore of Lake Erie from Niagara to extend their contacts with the Indians and explore the vast, unknown country which stretched all the way to the west. They also discovered at that time Point Pelee—the French word, *pelée*, means “skinned, peeled or bare”—and that's how the point appeared to those voyageurs who passed that way in the 1600s.

As I glanced through this book, I noticed that one of the first women to be mayor of a community in Ontario, in Canada, was the mayor of Leamington, Ontario, from 1952 to 1957. Her name was Her Worship Mayor Grace McFarland. When you read about Her Worship Mayor McFarland, she was certainly a strong advocate of women to get involved in politics, and she indeed was in many ways a groundbreaker in southwestern Ontario, when she served during those five very distinguished years.

Point Pelee, in Leamington, is of course the home of Heinz tomato. I had the opportunity, when I was a student doing my postgraduate work at the University of Windsor from 1979 to 1981, of going with some fellow students to visit both Point Pelee and the Jack Miner Bird Sanctuary, which was a very fascinating way to spend a full day on Point Pelee, going through that bird sanctuary and learning about Jack Miner's dedication to wildlife, and visiting the community of Leamington, the capital, where Heinz foods is located, and seeing such great events as the tomato festival and everything associated with the activity of Heinz in Leamington and certainly the great growth of the greenhouse growers.

Interjection.

Mr. Jeff Leal: As does my friend Mr. Rosario Marchese, I support the bill. I and my friend from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock know what confusion you can get. There are many people who think that I represent all of Peterborough county. In fact, I only represent five municipalities in Peterborough county. The two northwestern municipalities and the southwestern municipality are indeed represented by my friend from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock and it does create some confusion. So this afternoon we have an opportunity to carve out of Essex that great town of Leamington, attach it to Chatham-Kent and really let everybody have a thorough understanding of where the boundaries of that riding exist. I don't have to speak anymore. This Bill 104 is a slam dunk.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Colle: I was really disappointed with my colleague from Trinity-Spadina. Considering all the tomato sauce that he has eaten in his life, he never stands up in this House and says “thanks” to the good people of Leamington for all the tomatoes they've been producing for the last 100 years. So I will do that on your behalf. I just want to thank the member.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Don't forget, Nino Ricci is from there.

Mr. Mike Colle: And Nino Ricci's from there. But I think, as other members have said, this is an opportunity for members to talk about their riding and to, in essence, give all of us in this chamber an opportunity to understand about the geography, the strengths of this riding. We all need to learn more about Ontario's geography. As the member said, “Who can stop and think and say that Leamington is at the same latitude as Rome?” Why go on vacation in Rome, I say to the member from Trinity-Spadina, when you can go to Leamington or Point Pelee provincial park? Or why go to California? Why go to Santa Barbara when you can go to Point Pelee park?

It's important to understand that we as Ontarians or Canadians sometimes undervalue what we have. As we know, Leamington has been named the best place in Canada to live, yet how many in this chamber have been to Leamington? I see a couple of hands go up. Not enough of us visit these incredible places in Ontario.

I think the member is trying to, in essence, give Leamington this identity and clarity of identity, and that's what this bill is about, so it has a very serious purpose. By bringing this bill forward, what he's doing is trying to correct an anomaly, given that the name of the riding is not really one that gives clarity to the location of where the riding is.

If there's a place in Canada or Ontario that deserves recognition and appreciation and deserves, really, international recognition, it is this wonderful spot in the banana belt of Canada, and that's the area of Leamington, Point Pelee, which is actually a magnet for people from all over the world. Point Pelee is one of the birdwatching magnets of the world. People come from every corner of the world. As beautiful as Northumberland and Quinte is, people from all over the world do go to Point Pelee for the birdwatching. It is incredible. In fact, during the spring, you can't get a hotel room or motel room anywhere near Leamington or Point Pelee, because it's such an attractive place.

By putting this bill forward, I think what the member is doing is just saying to all of us, “I think for people who are thinking of visiting a place in Ontario, Point Pelee and Leamington may be a place to visit, may be a place to retire.” With that kind of climate, why do you have to go to Florida and waste all those dollars in the winter? Don't go to Florida this winter; go to Leamington. You can have wonderful food, and besides that, why not invest in Leamington? There's already one of the world's largest greenhouse industries right there. It's a billion-dollar industry. So there are great business opportunities

in Leamington. We sometimes take that for granted because like the member from Trinity-Spadina, we sometimes don't appreciate where that tomato sauce comes from. It comes from the hardworking people in Leamington who are planting those tomatoes and digging those tomato plants. So thanks to Leamington—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Mr. Hoy, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Pat Hoy: Thank you to everyone who made comments here.

Perhaps the member from Trinity-Spadina will come to Leamington. He probably did not know that those tomatoes came from there or perhaps came from there.

It is indeed a fact that many people are retiring in Leamington because of the climate that it enjoys in the southernmost part of mainland Canada. That is why people are coming to Leamington, the greatest place to live, as deemed by Money Sense, not only in Ontario, but in all of Canada.

I want to just respond to the member for Oxford for a moment here. He was talking about Chatham-Kent, and I want him to be clear about this. Chatham-Kent is one municipality. It did have a two-tier government at one time: Kent county and the city of Chatham. It was amalgamated some years ago before we took power here, and it is now the single municipality with the name Chatham-Kent. I don't represent three municipalities; I represent two: Chatham-Kent and Leamington.

I'm doing this for the people of Leamington so that they can get the recognition that they well deserve. There are other ridings that probably could fit with somewhat similar circumstances to mine. I note that we have Ottawa Centre, Ottawa South, York West and York Centre, but this change in name is one that I will characterize as being clean. It is only the municipality of Leamington that we're talking about. There is no little part of another municipality or any part of a municipality that's into someone else's riding. It's a move forward that I think is positive for the people of Leamington. I do it for them—and I want to tell you that I don't live in Leamington; I live in Chatham-Kent. I live in a small village called Merlin. It has 500 people, 200 dogs and perhaps a few hundred cats. It is the home of the country and western singer Michelle Wright, and those of you I know who like country and western music would know Michelle Wright. She is our pride and joy.

I appreciate all your help with this bill here today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The time for that ballot item has expired.

1530

REGISTERED RETIREMENT SAVINGS PROTECTION ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LA PROTECTION DES RÉGIMES ENREGISTRÉS D'ÉPARGNE EN VUE DE LA RETRAITE

Mr. Leal moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 96, An Act respecting protection for registered retirement savings / Projet de loi 96, Loi visant à protéger les régimes d'épargne-retraite enregistrés.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order 97, Mr. Leal, you have up to 12 minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I rise in the House today to speak in support of my private member's bill entitled Bill 96, An Act respecting protection for registered retirement savings, 2008. As you may be aware, the purpose of the bill is to protect registered retirement savings plan and registered retirement income funds, as well as deferred profit-sharing plans, from most creditors. Those plans, however, and I stress, will still be subject to support orders under the Family Responsibility and Support Arrears Enforcement Act, 1996, and orders respecting the separation of property in family members.

First of all, I'd like to thank Mr. Mark Gaskell, a constituent resident of Peterborough riding, for having the initial foresight to raise this issue with me. Mr. Gaskell very succinctly expressed his desire for the Ontario Legislature to protect from creditors what retirement savings the people of Ontario manage to accumulate in various forms of registered retirement savings plans, as have the provinces of Saskatchewan in 2003, Newfoundland and Labrador in 2006, and Prince Edward Island, British Columbia, Quebec and Manitoba in 2007.

Secondly, I'd like to extend my thanks to my special assistant in aboriginal affairs, Mr. André Nicoletti, for his research and preparation of this bill for me.

After a thorough investigation in this regard, I heartily agree with Mr. Gaskell's observations. I'd also like to take a moment to applaud the efforts of Minister Bartolucci for having brought forward a similar piece of private member's legislation in June 2003, entitled An Act exempting registered retirement plans from certain enforcement processes.

All governments in Canada encourage early and regular participation in retirement savings and ask that Canadians rely not only upon government to provide retirement income sufficient to maintain a reasonable and healthy lifestyle as we go. To facilitate and provide investment incentives, Canadians are provided with tax deferrals on income amounts invested in retirement savings. Saving for retirement through various investment vehicles such as retirement savings plans, RSPs; deferred profit-sharing plans, DPSPs; and registered retirement income funds, RRIFs, is a wise and widely encouraged practice.

As Mr. Gaskell notes, in Ontario today, the vast majority of working people are self-employed or employed by small businesses. In fact, there are more than 340,000 small and medium-sized enterprises across Ontario, which make up more than 99% of the province's businesses and account for more than 50% of all jobs. Many of these folks are not in a position to receive self-directed retirement vehicles to augment their pension plans as offered through the public or some private sector employment. As such, a considerable number of citizens

must rely upon their personal investments, such as RRSPs, to sustain themselves in retirement years.

While all governments in Canada rightfully encourage these sorts of investments, current law in Ontario does not exempt DPSPs, RRIFs or RSPs from credit seizure. As such, the law in regard to credit seizure is inconsistent and therefore unfair in its treatment of registered retirement holders.

As previously stated, other provinces in Canada have already passed similar forms of legislation. In November 2007, the government of Manitoba, under the stewardship of finance minister Greg Selinger, passed into law the Registered Retirement Savings Protection Act. As Mr. Selinger noted, "The Registered Retirement Savings Protection Act is designed to protect from creditors retirement savings held in deferred profit-sharing plans, registered retirement savings plans and registered retirement income funds. ... We want Manitobans to have retirement savings available in their senior years and so we have moved to protect these funds." Likewise, in 2005, the government of Canada, through amendments to the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act under Bill C-55, initiated similar legislation. The act, subject to certain conditions and exemptions, exempts registered plans from being vested in a trustee as property available to satisfy the claims of bankrupt creditors. Though this bill has indeed received royal assent, it has yet to be proclaimed into law.

I can certainly understand why skeptics may be concerned that this legislation could possibly be used as a safe haven for debtors who wish to avoid or defraud their related creditors. However, this is certainly not the intent. As stated in the preamble, the legislation explicitly exempts orders made under the Family Responsibility and Support Arrears Enforcement Act, meaning that parents who are defaulting on child support can still be pursued, as can separating spouses. Also, as with retirement pension plans, the creditor protection provided in a new law will not apply to the enforcement of maintenance orders or orders for the division of family property. Similarly, the anticipated federal act protects against debit abuse by capping the amount of the exemption, by making contributions within 12 months of a bankruptcy available to creditors and by requiring that the exempted amount be locked in until rolled over into a retirement income fund annuity or similar product.

In this economic climate of uncertainty and fluctuation of world markets, I believe that the spirit of this bill is not only fair but timely. Ontario's manufacturing sector has been hit hard by an economically challenged United States trading partner, a high Canadian dollar and that high price of oil. While small and medium-size manufacturers have held up reasonably well for a time, the last couple of years have been especially difficult for them. We can and will protect our public services and, at the very least, assist those small Ontario entrepreneurs. As stated yesterday in Ontario's fall economic outlook and fiscal review, the slowing United States economy and global financial situation has undermined businesses and

consumer confidence. These impacts are not only real and present, but directly affect individuals, families and governments in Ontario.

The main goal of this legislation is to reinforce our government's commitment, not only to protect those retirees whose plans are left unprotected, but also to the entrepreneurial success of Ontario's small business community. As a former parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, and chair of the Small Business Agency of Ontario, I understand the fundamental challenges and concerns facing Ontario's small businesses, let alone the courage it takes to start up and operate a successful small business. From streamlining regulations to reducing the paper burden, perhaps we can further assist small business people.

As stated in the 2008 British Columbia Chamber of Commerce report entitled *Advocacy and Policy: Retirement Savings Protection*, "It is imperative that ... business people who provide so much of our province's employment and their employees enjoy the same level of protection as ... those covered by the current list of exempted investments. Other provinces in Canada have recognized the inequity in retirement protection and ... enacted provincial exemption statutes to fully protect self-directed ... savings" plans.

Likewise, the Manitoba charter of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, in a November 29, 2006, letter to Mr. Jon Gerrard, leader of the Liberal Party of Manitoba, expresses their desire to see passage of the government's retirement protection proposal: "On behalf of the ... CFIB" in Manitoba "and ... 4,800 Manitoba members, I am writing in reference to the introduction of Bill 6, the Registered Retirement Savings Protection Act.... The CFIB urges your party to support Bill 6 and ensure its passage as soon as possible. Removing this disincentive to" invest "in RRSPs by small business owners" and individuals "will ensure a fair and equitable solution to an issue they have faced ... far too long."

This type of initiative certainly has not been overlooked by our counterparts in Washington. In 2006, the United States government signed into law the Pension Protection Act, ensuring greater retirement security for American workers. In part, this pension protection initiative contains provisions for workers who have saved for retirement through defined contribution plans, much as we have been hearing on CNN today, the 401Ks, which are very similar to our registered retirement plans here in Ontario and Canada.

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I believe that these turbulent economic times call for a steady hand and wise economic decisions, no matter the size or the complexity. Each on our own, we can rise to the challenge of the global economy and move forward in a prudent and responsible way. As such, this is a simple idea that has potential to protect Ontarians, both in terms of social security as we age and in terms of present economic development benefits.

As the Premier stated recently, we can't do everything, but we can do everything we can. I believe that this bill has merit and should be given due consideration by this Legislature.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I'm very pleased to rise this afternoon in support of Bill 96, An Act respecting protection for registered retirement savings. I do commend the member from Peterborough for bringing this important matter forward to correct an inequity that exists for retirement savings vehicles. I also agree that it is particularly timely, given the very challenging economic times in which we're living currently. I do commend him for bringing it forward.

There is definitely a gap here that needs to be addressed between the registered retirement savings plans and registered retirement income funds held by individuals who are mostly self-employed entrepreneurs in the province of Ontario and those people who are subscribers to larger pension funds, either federally or provincially, whose pensions are protected under the current legislation, so that the practical result of this legislation as we go forward would be that the savings in a registered retirement savings plan would be exempt from seizure from creditors in the event that someone is sued, for example, and there is a judgment obtained, or by any other types of creditors. Those sorts of vehicles would be protected, which just makes sense when you consider the protection that is afforded to others holding similar programs, only in larger pensions and registered pensions.

Of course, there are some exemptions to it which are quite sensible. The Family Responsibility Office still will be able to make collections and to make claims over registered retirement savings plans in the same way they always have, which makes eminent sense in the context of the family situation. The Fraudulent Conveyances Act will also continue to operate so that people who may be facing creditors cannot just suddenly put money into registered retirement savings plans in order to avoid their creditors. That also is an important consideration to bring to bear.

We're pleased as Progressive Conservative members of the Legislature to support this legislation, because of course it does a number of things that we're very much in favour of. It encourages savings in the first place. Again, particularly in the challenging times in which we're living, the more that people are able to save to protect themselves from turbulent economic times, the better. It also levels the playing field in terms of the savings vehicles so that there is equality in the treatment of these pension plans. It also encourages and protects our entrepreneurs and small businesses, who of course provide the majority of the employment in the province of Ontario. I think it's particularly appropriate that they be given some protection to put them on the same playing field as people who are employed in other sectors of our workforce.

So we are very pleased to support this legislation. I expect and hope that the other members in this Legis-

lature will also follow suit and support it. I think it's a good measure of protection and, again, comes at a very timely point in our history.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I too will be supporting the bill presented by the member from Peterborough. I suspect, by the way—not to be prescient again—that we're going to have support from everyone, and there's a good reason for it. This bill would protect small business owners and others and would protect their RRSPs from creditors, whether or not bankruptcy has been declared. That is important because we know there are a whole lot of individuals who do not have a private pension, who rely on RRSPs as their pension when they retire. They're worried, and for good reason, because Ontario savings—pensions, mutual funds, RRSPs and so on—are tied to the stock market. They're worried about their financial future and want their savings protected from the wild swings of the market. So we can't have this discussion without looking at the markets.

By the way, member from Peterborough, my sense is that even the cabinet will support this. I suspect they will support this at second and third readings, in spite of the bad record your government has in terms of its support for private members' bills. But in spite of that, my sense—I could be wrong—is that even the cabinet is going to support you on this. So, let's assume they are going to do that.

Without talking about why we need to do it, we need to talk about the market and why it is that such a bill is before us. If we don't talk about what has been happening in the market, it would be a mistake. We know that in the last month or so, all the wealth created for those who had money invested in stocks, and so on, literally disappeared—20%, 30%, 40%, depending on where your money was invested. That is a serious worry for people. It's a worry for me, because since Mike Harris, we in this place don't have a pension.

Now, Mike did okay when he left, but most of us did not do well. Those of us who were here for a couple of years and all the Conservative members who came after Mike Harris, God bless him, don't have a pension unless they are independently wealthy. God bless those of you who are independently wealthy. Those of you who are not wealthy have your money in RRSPs and whatever else you do, and it's not protected. It's a serious worry.

So I say that we need to look at why the market has not served us so well. What is it that allowed these investors to say that the marketplace is the best place to put your money? "It's safe and it's good, and you'll make a whole lot of money." It's a casino, my friends. You throw your money into that casino and you never know what's going to happen. That money is at risk at any time, and this in the context of a market that is supposed to be efficient—some say scientific; some say calculating. Yes, there may be some swings, but don't worry, it'll come up again.

I'm telling you, it is often irrational. The swings are more frequent than you would like, it's unpredictable and

we don't know what might happen to those savings. In terms of market collapses, this is one of the worst we have seen in a long time—since the 1930s—so people are absolutely worried. Even the president of France, Monsieur Sarkozy, is worried. He calls for the need to bring ethics into financial capitalism. Now, Monsieur Sarkozy is a conservative president. He's worried. Even Bush, God bless him, says we need to sober up on Wall Street. Yeah, thanks a lot, Mr. Bush. Understand that even conservative types like Bush and Sarkozy are saying we need to regulate capitalism.

Mr. Mike Colle: That's socialism.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Exactly. A whole lot of these banks have been nationalized—in America. Did you hear that? Not just Iceland and places in Europe; the United States has nationalized some banks.

It's funny to hear these conservatives in the US—I'm amused by it. They say, "Socialism when necessary, but otherwise, capitalism all the way." Isn't it funny how, when the economic system collapses, they reach over to socialism to save them? And once they save them, and ordinary folks are stuck with paying that debt, they say, "Okay, move over, it's time for you to pay up, the system has served us well," and bring the wealth back to the very speculators who brought the system down. It's scary stuff. It's absolutely scary.

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We need to regulate our markets, and a number of economists are saying we need regulation in order to protect people's savings and their RRSPs.

Mr. Mike Colle: Even Greenspan.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Greenspan and others, of course, they love socialism today. They love it.

We need regulation. We need the creation of a financial product safety commission just like we have for consumer goods, as recommended by one prominent columnist. This would address the invention of new financial products "not intended to manage risk but to create risk." We need to ensure regulators oversee the areas of finance that are now unregulated. To quote another financial expert, "If it quacks like a bank, regulate it like a bank." This includes real regulation of hedge funds and large pools of capital that are able to manipulate markets for quick profits in quick seconds, and they do, in seconds. You've got capitalism collapsing, reaching out to socialism, "Please help us today. We need you," and they easily discard it when they no longer need it. Strengthen regulation that restricts leverage to all financial companies. Leverage is the proportion of debt used in speculation and was one of the causes of the current crisis. These are some of the suggestions that we put forth today in this debate that we need to discuss.

Regulation is key to our financial markets. When Conservatives speak about regulation, it warms my socialist heart to hear them, God bless, because it speaks to an awareness of a problem that is beyond their control. They worry too. Even rich people worry. In fact, the rich people worry more than those who don't have because they've got a lot more to lose. Because the little guy who

doesn't have much, he doesn't have much to worry about. But oh, the big fish and the big speculators making loads of money on our backs are really worried about the collapse of the markets.

So I say to you, Jeff, member from Peterborough, I support your bill. It will protect businesspeople, small business and a lot of individuals who've got no other protection in the event that they need it. I hope that you and your government will look to the bigger picture, because if you don't put it in that context it means absolutely nothing.

I'll leave the remaining time to my colleague from Parkdale-High Park, who wants to speak to this as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Pat Hoy: I want to commend my colleague from Peterborough, Mr. Leal, on bringing this bill forward, An Act respecting protection for registered retirement savings. Much has been said thus far about the timeliness of this bill and the economic state of the world perhaps driven by calamities in the United States in the main. I'm not certain that the member thought about this bill for this particular time and the events that surround us now. It might have been researched and thought about many months ago, as many of us do when we turn our minds towards a private member's bill. It might only be by coincidence in time and history that we're discussing the timeliness of this bill, as it were.

Small business owners and their families work extremely hard. Everyone attests to that. Retirees worked hard throughout their lives, and they may have been fortunate enough to start a small nest egg in an RRSP, a DPSP and then eventually an RRIF. They worked hard to achieve that, and for many of them hard work is just simply a way of life. They work from dusk till dawn in many cases. I suspect many of those hard-working small business owners don't have huge RRSPs put to the side for their retirement. They depend on that because in many cases they don't have a pension plan within their household at all.

How many of us have either taken advantage of this advice or given the following advice: "Buy your RRSPs at a young age. Buy them now. If you can't buy a lot, put a little bit in each month, just a very small amount; the monies will grow." I think almost all of us have heard that very good advice and have probably, if we can, taken it. Of course when I was much younger, there wasn't such a vehicle at all. There were no such savings. Basically, the saving that I was aware of at the time was to put it into a bank and accept the interest rate on that day, week, month or year. Now we have these other vehicles put aside with the intended purpose of providing for one's pension into the future, particularly for the people we're talking about, the small business owners, retirees; those people have worked very hard. I think it's good legislation to bring forward to protect the investment that they've made as they have worked so hard for their families.

The member for Peterborough mentioned safe haven. When I looked at this bill, I used a different term—I was

thinking of sheltering—but I think we're talking about the same thing. I wouldn't want members to think that through this legislation people could take monies, put them into one of these investment vehicles and shelter or have a safe haven from their creditors. We all know here that there are limits on the amounts of money that one can put into one of these plans. I'm not very versed in DPSPs, but I do know that in the others there are limits. So one could not shelter huge amounts of money because there are limits set by the federal government on what could be put into one of these plans. Therefore, I think we have a pretty sound bill here when we talk about safe haven and shelter.

With those remarks, I would urge everyone to support the bill and bring about a time when we can put this to committee and have a more thorough discussion on it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to take a few minutes today to comment on the legislation brought forward by my colleague from Peterborough, and that's Bill 96, An Act respecting protection for registered retirement savings.

I certainly do support the bill, as I believe our whole caucus does, because consistency is a very important matter in terms of how we treat retirement savings vehicles, and I believe one of the intentions of this proposed legislation is it do exactly that. There are many examples in my own riding of seniors and retirees who are struggling to get by, through no fault of their own, and deal with some of the challenges that life brings during post-employment years. I've also heard from a number of constituents the challenges they face from not having access to their locked-in pensions. I know the member for Halton introduced a bill about allowing people to access their locked-in pensions. I do have a constituent who is very tenacious about that, is suffering because he can't get to his locked-in pension, and hopes that he can get to it before he dies, because he needs the money today. He has been a very strong advocate of that, and we've worked with him and supported him in the past with that.

There's no question Ontario seniors and retirees have built the foundation for the strong Ontario that we have today. There is no member in this Legislature who would dispute that statement at all. They deserve to have control over their hard-earned retirement savings. I've heard from seniors and retirees who have stated that clearly the rules are too restrictive, so I hope today will spur on a good discussion on providing seniors and retirees the options about accessing their hard-earned money. It's only fair that they have access to their own money and a better plan for their retirement based on those needs.

It would be simple to change Ontario's pension rules with no cost to the taxpayer in a way that respects the wishes of these individuals to manage their money as they see fit. I think this is especially appropriate at this time with the economic uncertainty that we see with the stocks falling, the global situation that's occurring out

there and businesses that are going to be facing extreme challenges. People certainly do have a reason to be concerned about their investments and their nest eggs in today's volatile market. It's important to provide the types of resources and tools that can easily help with that burden.

I agree with Bill 96. If properly applied, it would certainly encourage our small business owners to invest more into RSPs and help them ensure that they have a financially secure retirement. It would certainly also encourage the employees of small businesses to look into ensuring that they are planning for their futures and their retirements. This week is Ontario Small Business Week, and, as has been mentioned, 98% of businesses in Ontario are considered small businesses. In my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, small businesses are key economic drivers. Small businesses are the hundreds and hundreds of farmers and agriculture businesses that they employ in my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. So it's certainly appropriate at this time, during Small Business Week, to salute our small business owner-operators and staff that are employed, and this bill does reflect partially on them.

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I know I'll be joining the mayor of the City of Kawartha Lakes tomorrow. As well, the Minister of Small Business will be in Lindsay presenting the annual innovation awards to some worthy recipients in the area of the City of Kawartha Lakes. There's certainly no shortage of innovation and forward thinking there. So it will be an exciting day to celebrate small business in my riding.

I want to also appreciate the member from Peterborough in crafting Bill 96 in a way that doesn't have a negative impact on the important aspects of the family responsibility and support awareness acts.

It appears to be a tangible, practical and applicable piece of proposed legislation. It would be applied to pensions and insurance-based retirement plans to protect them against seizure under provincial insurance and provincial and federal pension benefits legislation, while the RSPs and other deferred income plans were not. I know that in other provinces this has already been brought forward, as has been mentioned. So hopefully this will bring forward some more consistency in terms of credit seizure, allowing Ontarians more security in providing for themselves in their retirement years.

The senior and retiree population in my riding is significantly higher than the provincial average, which is just a bit over 13%. In the riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, it's more along the lines of 19% to 20%. It's not uncommon for people to decide to retire and move up to the beautiful cottage country that encompasses a large part of my riding. It's important that, as legislators, we understand the valuable social role that seniors and retirees play in the future of our communities. Promoting their health, their safety and financial security will certainly not only guarantee them a better quality of life, but it will help ensure our com-

munities continue to benefit from their knowledge and experience.

Bill 96 will help employers, employees and professionals who don't have registered plans also. As I say, certainly small businesses are the backbone of my riding in Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. This legislation that's being brought forward today by the member from Peterborough makes good sense, not just in these times, but I think we're doing catch-up with other provinces and federal legislation. So we're pleased to support Bill 96, the Registered Retirement Savings Protection Act, in the Legislature today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a delight to rise as well to support this bill, and also, of course, to rise as the critic for small business for the New Democrats to support small business in Small Business Week.

We've heard that if you owe \$100,000, it's your problem; if you owe \$100 million, it's the bank's problem. Now we're in an era where if you owe \$100 billion, it's everyone's problem.

Certainly this bill does something to protect those who have to supply their own pension plan, and that's RRSPs. We know that 91% of small business owners, according to one survey, invest in RRSPs to provide their own pension plan. And certainly we know that in this House, again, without a pension plan, many of the members here are part of that group who have to invest to provide for their own retirement, or else they don't retire. I often joke that I'm on the Freedom 95 plan: It's going to take me till then to save up enough. I'm sure there are many in small business across this province who are in the same boat.

I speak to small business owners all the time. I've been working with the Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas, TABIA, and have brought forward a resolution around business education tax, which we'd like to see more movement on too, because in the Toronto area, that tax is unfair in comparison to the 905 area. So there is lots more that we need to do to protect small business, but certainly Bill 96 is one step towards that. I simply hope, and this is absolutely non-partisan, that this goes to committee, that we have a chance to fully debate this bill in committee and to make it stronger. I hope, again, that the cabinet across the way supports that motion, because so many private members' bills' initiatives get lost in this place, and that that doesn't happen to this one and to the member from Peterborough, because it's a good one. We all agree it is, and we want to see it made into law sooner rather than later, because of the troubling times ahead.

The more that we can do to support the entrepreneur, the more that we can do to support the small business person, the more we do to support employment. As you heard the member from Whitby-Oshawa say, it is an absolute fact that small business is the major employer in our jurisdiction here in Ontario, and that's probably true around the world. So, to support everyone, we need to support small business. That's something that I think

needs to be emphasized over and over again in this place. Unfortunately, with bankruptcies already on the rise, we see that not enough is being done to do that. I know that other members have brought forward private members' bills around red tape, around tax reform. Here's one around RSPs.

Again, I would urge all members to think about the small businesses in their communities in this Small Business Week and to think about what more we could do as representatives here to support those critical members of our riding.

On behalf of New Democrats, we support this bill. We think it's a good one. We'd like to see it go to committee very quickly. We'd like to see it passed into law. We urge all members across from us not only to support it—members on this side clearly do—but, hopefully, you can also garner support from your cabinet and from your Premier so that this can be enacted as soon as possible.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It's a pleasure to rise in the House today, on behalf of my good friend Jeff Leal, to speak about Bill 96. It's one of those things you learn, and that I've learned in the last five years in being here, that certain things are so obvious and we just don't pay much attention to them, and when they're brought forward—"Why hasn't somebody thought of this umpteen years ago?"

I guess I could just say "ditto" to everything that's been said and sit down, because, as you heard, everybody is in favour of this. For some who have been self-employed all their lives, like I have, with no fixed pension plan from anywhere and the few dollars—not too many—that we were able to put away, the last month or so, we've seen them evaporate. I know that this does not fix that; I wish it did. But it does put in some roadblocks. Sometimes people who have worked hard all their lives, like Ontarians, through no fault of their own, come up with difficulties, and some of these assets are frozen or taken away from them. I would just hate to see that day come. So this is, as most people say, appropriate for the time. Like I say, this should have happened a long time ago.

When we see that the majority of the provinces across this country and other jurisdictions have adopted such pieces of legislation, one would say, in common terms, that this is a no-brainer. So I urge all the members—and I think, from what I've heard so far from all sides of the House, this is supported. I guess the member from Trinity-Spadina said that we who sit here in this Legislature, especially the ones who haven't been here very long, will have no security the day that we leave here except for a few dollars that are contributed to a retirement fund—not a pension—that's dwindling away. So I think any kind of protection—at no cost to anybody—is strictly government doing what it is supposed to do: protect its citizens.

I don't have a lot to say because, like I say, this just makes good sense, and I hope that we get this done, not

just through second reading here, but that it goes to committee quickly and that it goes to third reading and gets royal assent, because we certainly don't want to see anybody hurt out there. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to this.

1610

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: It gives me pleasure to rise as well in support of the member from Peterborough's private member's Bill 96. I want to take just a moment, though—as he mentioned at the very beginning of his speech, Mr. Gaskell is going to be very pleased today, I would think, if he has the opportunity to be watching these proceedings. I think this speaks so well for our process in private members' time on occasion, where this really is an opportunity when a constituent identifies for one of us a very critical issue to them or to those in the community that has the opportunity to come to the floor of this place and see support from all sides of the House—people speaking very positively about the initiative, people speaking to the importance of it in the context of understanding what it is for those who have retirement savings, those who are in their senior years and who are so dependent on those savings that they've put together over the years in judicious fashion and looking to protect those. But it's so important that this process allows for that to happen, and I think each of us wants to extend to Mr. Gaskell a sincere thank you for drawing this to the member from Peterborough, Mr. Leal's, attention in May of this year—at least that's the correspondence.

I suspect he probably spoke to him prior to that. He probably called him either here or at the constituency office. Maybe he had a meeting and told him what it was that he was concerned about, and I suspect that the member said, "Can you put something in writing for me? Can you kind of fill in the blanks a bit?" as he did when speaking about what's happened in Manitoba and a number of the other provinces, as you go through the correspondence that was provided in other jurisdictions where initiatives have been taken in this regard or are under consideration. That really speaks very well for what we're doing.

The current economic climate—others have spoken to that—is such that this is an opportune time for this Legislature to be considering this particular private member's bill, to be able to see it go to committee with broad support, because clearly the environment today is one in which each of us who has any money put away in retirement savings in one fashion or another is thinking about those savings. We hadn't necessarily considered what might happen in a circumstance where our fortunes had turned in some fashion, probably through no fault of our own. Those savings might have been at risk in addition to being a risk in the marketplace.

I note, as well, in Mr. Leal's correspondence to us that he made some reference to similar legislation that was brought forward as a private member's bill by the now-

Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, back in a former government time. I think that speaks as well to the fact that often these matters need to be brought before this Legislature on more than one occasion, as we know—before the public generally—before this Legislature would consider their adoption, before a government of the day would consider adoption. So it's opportune that this has come forward yet again to be considered, in effect, in this Legislature under private members' business and, potentially, by governments—the government of that day and the government of this day.

It was only a couple of years ago, during the budgetary process, that the province took an initiative and followed in line with what other jurisdictions are doing in a similar fashion, and that's with the LRIFs, the locked-in retirement income funds, that up until a couple of years ago in Ontario were 100% locked in and the pensioner had no access to those. Some jurisdictions treat it very differently. I believe that Saskatchewan allows 100% freedom for withdrawing from those locked-in retirement income funds. The province of Ontario moved from 100% locked-in to a one-time opportunity to unlock 25% of those. I must say that bureaucrats are rather concerned about that, but it was maybe, I'll suggest, a test of the marketplace, an opportunity to see what would happen, and hopefully the government will go back and review that situation when it has some data to work from.

I think this is the kind of bill that builds on that type of work. It's yet another opportunity for us to take a look at those who have money that they've set aside, first wanting to protect it, or, secondarily, in the other instance, wanting the option to be able to manage it in a fashion that they feel they want to manage it on their own behalf, feeling that they're the most appropriate folks to be doing that.

I'm pleased to be able to support Bill 96. I'm pleased on behalf of the member and his constituents and certainly encouraged, as I'm sure he is, by the very positive comments around this Legislature during the course of this afternoon's private members' debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I rise in support of the bill from the member for Peterborough. I think it's very important. It has been mentioned by many others, when it comes to RSPs for small business, that that is the only way they have of planning for the future. I think, because of circumstances that happened all the way through your life, that it isn't always that your future can stay protected, particularly if you had those funds in RSPs, where you cannot control them beyond that point; all of a sudden things happen and then not only your present leaves you but the future leaves you, too. So I think, definitely, the time has come. Particularly with the events of the last number of months, the time has come that we look after some of these folks in small business who have their future and their pension all waiting for them, but only what they've invested—then all of a sudden, because of circumstances beyond their control, they lose

all that, not only their present income but their future, too. I think it's very appropriate that we deal with this legislation today and thank them for their contributions that got us there, but make sure that what's left there for them is still there.

I was told many years ago when I was a young person that one must remember that the only thing that will be there when you get there is what you send on ahead. I don't think it's fair that these folks have all sent it on ahead and then find out that, for whatever reason, our laws didn't protect it so they would have it there when they got there. So I commend the member from Peterborough for bringing this forward, and I will be supporting it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Terrific. Further debate in the 24 seconds we have left? Seeing none, the honourable member for Peterborough, Mr. Leal, has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I want to thank the members in the House this afternoon who spoke very positively in support of Bill 96—Pickering—Scarborough East; Chatham—Kent—Essex, soon to be Chatham—Kent—Leamington; Parkdale—High Park; Northumberland—Quinte West; Whitby—Oshawa; Trinity—Spadina; Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock and Oxford—to provide some comments today. Hopefully, we can move this bill forward. It is timely, certainly during Small Business Week and, of course, the economic turmoil that is now being felt internationally, throughout the world. It's interesting to note that, on paper, the New York Stock Exchange has now lost some \$3 trillion.

I get calls—the member from Pickering—Scarborough East mentioned Mark Gaskell, who did contact me many months ago. He had done some extensive research in other provinces in Canada and pointed out to me that Ontario was one of the remaining provinces that didn't have such protection of RRSPs if someone, unfortunately, is going into bankruptcy proceedings. One would have thought that the Ontario securities exchange—Ontario being, as John Robarts used to say, the great linchpin of Confederation—would certainly be a leader in this field to make sure that there was a legislative framework in place to protect RRSPs and other investment instruments from a situation where one might find themselves in a state of bankruptcy.

I'm really hoping, with the all-party support today, that we'll get this Bill 96 on to committee. At some future point, I happen to think this would be an important piece of legislation to be passed to provide that protection. As clearly articulated by all members in the House today, this is a good bill that has all-party support.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order 98(e), the time for private members' public business has concluded before the expiry of the allotted two and a half hours. This standing order is there to give some certainty for members who may want to come to the House to vote. Therefore, the House is suspended until 4:25.

The House suspended proceedings from 1619 to 1625.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will deal first with ballot item number 46, standing in the name of Mr. Sergio.

SENIORS' OMBUDSMAN ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR L'OMBUDSMAN DES PERSONNES ÂGÉES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Sergio has moved second reading of Bill 102, An Act to establish the Seniors' Ombudsman. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Sergio.

Mr. Mario Sergio: To the general government committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it agreed that the bill be referred to the general government committee? So referred.

We will now deal with ballot item number 47, standing in the name of Mr. Hoy.

REPRESENTATION AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA REPRÉSENTATION ÉLECTORALE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Hoy has moved second reading of Bill 104, An Act to amend the Representation Act, 2005. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The Chair recognizes Mr. Hoy.

Mr. Pat Hoy: I would ask that this bill be sent to the committee on justice policy, please.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it agreed that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy? So referred.

We will now deal with the final ballot item, number 48, standing in the name of Mr. Leal.

REGISTERED RETIREMENT SAVINGS PROTECTION ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LA PROTECTION DES RÉGIMES ENREGISTRÉS D'ÉPARGNE EN VUE DE LA RETRAITE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Leal has moved second reading of Bill 96, An Act respecting protection for registered retirement savings. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The member for Peterborough, Mr. Leal.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I'd ask that this bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it agreed that the bill be referred to the standing committee? So referred.

Orders of the day.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The Minister of Labour has moved adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

We're so adjourned until next Monday at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1627.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Steve Peters

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

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Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
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Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
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Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (LIB)	London West / London-Ouest	Attorney General / Procureur général
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / Ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Broten, Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Brown, Michael A. (LIB)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development / Ministre du Développement économique
		Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
		Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Carroll, Hon. / L'hon. M. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	Minister of Culture / Ministre de la Culture
		Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (LIB)	Essex	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
		Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
		Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
		Minister of Revenue / Ministre du Revenu

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Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby—Oshawa	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (LIB)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora—Rainy River	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Hoy, Pat (LIB)	Chatham—Kent—Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West—Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest—Glanbrook	
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges—Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (LIB)	Brampton—Springdale	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (NDP)	Welland	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Kular, Kuldip (LIB)	Bramalea—Gore—Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Malonde, Jean-Marc (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Neal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Neveac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean—Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga—Brampton South / Mississauga—Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity—Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Maurio, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough— Westdale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa—Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Carol (LIB)	Huron—Bruce	
Moridi, Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	
Munro, Julia (PC)	York—Simcoe	
Murdoch, Bill (IND)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	
Naqvi, Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Trout, John (PC)	Durham	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Oraziotti, David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pendergast, Leeanna (LIB)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (LIB)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres
		Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches–East York	Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de parti reconnu
Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of International Trade and Investment / Ministre du Commerce international et de l'Investissement
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Ramal, Khalil (LIB)	London–Fanshawe	
Ramsay, David (LIB)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Runciman, Robert W. (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Ruprecht, Tony (LIB)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Monique M. (LIB)	Nipissing	Minister of Tourism / Ministre du Tourisme
		Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Deputy Premier / Vice-premier ministre
		Minister of Energy and Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Énergie et de l'Infrastructure
Sorbara, Greg (LIB)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services / Ministre des Petites Entreprises et des Services aux consommateurs
Van Bommel, Maria (LIB)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Wilkinson, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Perth–Wellington	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)	Kitchener–Waterloo	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
		Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Zimmer, David (LIB)	Willowdale	

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Gilles Bisson, Kim Craiton
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Wayne Arthurs, Toby Barrett
Pat Hoy, Jean-Marc Lalonde
Leeanna Pendergast, Michael Prue
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Lisa MacLeod, Julia Munro
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Leza Moridi, Yasir Naqvi
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Honourable Steve Peters**Président**
L'honorable Steve Peters**Clerk**
Deborah Deller**Greffière**
Deborah Deller

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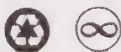
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 27 October 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 27 octobre 2008

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: Today is the University of Waterloo Deans' Day at Queen's Park, so it's my privilege to welcome in the east gallery this morning representatives from the university. We have Dr. David Johnston, the president and vice-chancellor of the University of Waterloo. We have two—

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: A few more on the list.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: That's right, there's a few more to go.

We have two vice-presidents: Amrit Chakma and Meg Beckel. We have a plethora of deans this morning: Ken Coates, Thomas Coleman, Roger Mannell, Adel Sedra, Deep Saini, Terry McMahon. And with us also this morning from the university we have Ross McGregor, Bob Truman, Wanda Richardson and John Stevens.

Please help me in welcoming the University of Waterloo this morning.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of the member from Durham, and on behalf of page Kevin Turner, welcome his mother, Denise, and his brother Joshua. They are in the west members' gallery this morning. Welcome.

ORAL QUESTIONS

VIOLENT CRIME

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Attorney General. Over the last two weeks we've seen an alarming number of shootings and homicides that have Ontarians seriously worried about their personal safety in their homes and when they're out in public.

This past weekend a 23-year-old girl from my hometown of Brockville, Bailey Zaveda, was shot and killed. She was a completely innocent bystander in the wrong place at the wrong time. According to police, the alleged shooter has a very extensive criminal record and is a very violent person. We know he had been previously charged in a 2005 shooting.

Attorney General, can you explain the circumstances under which this man, the alleged killer, was on the street?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Of course, all of our sympathies go out to the families affected by this and the communities affected by these terrible tragedies.

I won't speak to the specifics of the case because, as the honourable member knows, I won't interfere with a police investigation. Interfering with a police investigation would do injustice to the very goal that my friend and I share, which is ensuring community safety.

We've taken a very strong stand that's very tough on crime, as a government. We've provided for more police, and we're working with Police Chief Blair, Ian Davidson, who's head of the chiefs of police, and all local chiefs to find the right approach, the best possible approach, for utilizing those officers on the ground. We've made further investments through our guns and gangs task force, and we will continue to make sure that we take the toughest possible approach for the serious and dangerous people who on our —

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: People, I suspect, are sick and tired of that kind of response, getting up and justifying the failings of the justice system. Innocent people, innocent bystanders, are losing their lives, people are invading their homes, because the justice system made decisions that put these people back onto the streets to endanger lives. That's what you're standing up here on a daily basis defending, and you should be ashamed of yourself.

If you really care about public safety, you're going to stand up, allow the debate to occur tomorrow, which you're trying to block, and let us get an insight into what's going on in the system, why it's failing all of us, and do something about it. Will you stand up and give us a straight answer today?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I don't believe that the thousand extra police officers we have put on the street are nothing. I don't believe the 329 new police officers that were announced last Thursday are nothing. I don't believe the \$68 million into the guns and gangs task force is nothing.

But my honourable friend should know that the Criminal Code is federal jurisdiction. It's time he picked up the phone and called his friend Harper. When we called for tougher bail laws, he scoffed. When we called for Harper to put in the Nunn commission recommendations

on young offenders, he scoffed. He questioned about Harper's crime policy which had nothing about bail. It's time he picked up the phone and recognized federal jurisdiction. Call your chum and do something about it.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My God, what an alarming abdication of responsibility. Two weeks ago, with the murders of two women in the sanctity of their home—that's a situation where the alleged killer is someone who Toronto Police Chief Bill Blair says never should have been released from jail after he'd been charged with two violent sex assaults. He said the murders could have been and should have been prevented. You know who failed to appeal that bail decision? Your crown. You know who failed to ask for electronic monitoring? Your crown.

Minister, you are responsible for the crown law office in this government. You are the one responsible for the failings of the justice system, the administration of the system, in the province. When are you going to pull back the curtain, let the people know what's going on, and correct the problems?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: There are many things that I would like to say, but I cannot say things that might jeopardize an ongoing prosecution because jeopardizing that would put at risk the very public safety that we are here to protect. We're doing everything within our power to be as tough as possible on the dangerous and the violent.

It is not ours alone. We need the federal government to step up and do what they can. We're glad they brought in tougher bail laws, when we asked, for those who have serious gun crime charges. We're glad they brought in mandatory minimums for serious gun crimes. We're not happy that they did not change the young offender legislation to deal with out-of-control youth. We're not happy they didn't change the two-for-one credit provisions. We're not happy that my honourable friend is not—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

VIOLENT CRIME

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: We've had so many violent deaths in the past couple of weeks—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): To whom?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Sorry, to the Attorney General: We have families concerned, people worried about walking on the streets. We're talking to people this morning who are worried about going into downtown Toronto, walking the streets, in the evenings because of the deaths that we've seen over the past few months.

I ask the Attorney General, instead of the rhetoric we hear in here on a regular basis blaming the federal government—he has a range of tools; he's responsible for the administration of justice in this province—to stand up today and explain why his crowns failed to appeal the bail release decision and why they failed to request elec-

tronic monitoring in terms of the death of those two women.

1040

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The honourable member must know that I am not in a position to comment on the case, but he insists on trying to elicit comments that, if made by me, might endanger the very community safety we are trying to protect. When decisions are made in the justice system, they are made according to the rules that exist. The rules for bail hearing are found in the Criminal Code and in the charter, and the federal government is in charge of the Criminal Code. My honourable friend should know that.

It is time for an end to the rhetoric, I tell my friend. It is time we recognize that there is a partnership. It is time that we recognize that although this government can fund more police officers, as we have—another 329 last Thursday—and we can put in the guns and gangs task force, we can't change the bail rules unless the federal government is onside. It's time for the federal government to come to the table, and we look forward—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: People viewing this proceeding should not only be alarmed, but they have to just wonder: "Whose side is this guy on? Who is he protecting? Is he protecting the great public in Ontario or is he protecting bureaucrats in a system that's failing public safety in Ontario?"

That's really what's happening here on a regular, consistent basis with this government. I'm not sure what he's afraid of. Pull back the curtains. The system is failing Ontarians on a regular basis. People are dying; innocent people are dying in the sanctity of their own homes. Will you stand up and say you're going to do something about it, and not fight our debate tomorrow, not try to close off debate, and give the people of Ontario and the people of this assembly, who represent Ontarians, an opportunity to take a good look—an inside look at what's happening—at the failings of the system and work together to correct it?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The debate issues are in the Speaker's hands, not mine. When we moved for reverse onus bail for serious gun crimes, I don't remember the support of the honourable member. When we moved for mandatory minimums for serious gun crimes, I don't remember the support of the honourable member. When we moved to get the federal government to toughen the bail laws for young offenders, the member opposite was nowhere to be seen. When we heard the Prime Minister's proposals for federal crime legislation, and I raised toughening bail laws, the honourable member scoffed. He only wanted to talk about the Prime Minister's proposal.

I say to the honourable member, it's fine just to chase the headline, but when you do, you will always be behind, sir. We want your assistance in toughening the laws

that protect our communities—assistance rather than rhetoric from you—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I've had a 15- or 20-year history of fighting for victims of crime, and if this minister wants to attack my personal integrity and wants to attack my motivation, that is not going to stand up to any kind of scrutiny at all. We're asking legitimate questions; the public are asking legitimate questions. We have real victims of crime because of failings of a system that you are responsible for, Attorney General, your crown law office making decisions that impact the public safety of every one of us—every one of us, and we've seen lives lost as a result of the failings. We are asking you to do something about it. Stop defending a system that's failing the people of Ontario. When will you start doing that?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: When we propose to do something, the honourable member is not there. When we propose to toughen the bail legislation, we can't count on his support. We do need your support. When we propose to end the two-for-one remission credit, I don't hear the honourable member's support. When we propose to ask the Harper government to toughen the laws to protect Ontarians, with which they have control, I don't see the honourable member's support.

So what I say to him is, when we invest in extra police officers, when we invest in guns and gangs task forces, when we work with the police, we do need the honourable member's support and his party's support to get the federal government to toughen and change the rules with which we all must comply, which deal with the dangerous and serious offenders. When will you stand up for the people of our communities and join with us and ask Harper to change the rules?

SKILLS TRAINING

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Acting Premier. Seven months ago, the McGuinty government commenced its so-called Second Career program amidst television ads, radio ads and newspaper ads. The McGuinty government couldn't congratulate itself enough about the so-called Second Career program. Now, seven months later, while 230,000 Ontarians have been laid off from their jobs, only 1,100 of those workers have enrolled in the much-ballyhooed Second Career program. That's less than one half of one per cent of the workers who have lost their jobs.

Will the McGuinty government now admit that its much-boasted-about Second Career program has been a dismal and total flop?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. John Milloy: I'm sure the honourable member would never want to leave the impression that Second Career is the only program that's available to laid-off workers in the province of Ontario. Through Employ-

ment Ontario, 900,000 Ontarians every year have access to support in everything from job search through to training, both long-term and short-term. In terms of short-term training, over the last year we've had about 13,000 people come forward.

As the honourable member is aware, as part of the budget, we announced that we would be coming forward with a longer-term training program, which went into effect in June, with advertising in July. Since then, we've seen in the most recent statistics about 1,300 people come forward and a lot of very-good-news stories. At the time of introducing it, we made a commitment that we would continue to monitor the program, and if we found that there—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: This is so typical of the McGuinty government. You ask them about their much-boasted-about Second Career program, and they try to talk about everything else but.

But there is a real tragedy here: 230,000 workers who have lost their jobs, lost their livelihoods, many of them losing their homes, many of them losing their families, and the McGuinty government's sole response was the so-called Second Career. You couldn't spend enough money on the television advertising; you couldn't spend enough money on the radio advertising. I'm sure some of you have arthritis in your shoulders from slapping yourselves on the back so many times. But 1,100 workers: That's all who signed up. Do you know why? Because there aren't any jobs. You can talk about retraining all you want; there are fewer jobs this week than there were last week.

When is the McGuinty government going to get it through its thick head that the issue is jobs? You can talk retraining all you want; people want jobs.

Hon. John Milloy: I'm very happy to talk about the 13,000 people who have come forward for short-term training over the last year, I'm very happy to talk about the 1,300 who have come for longer-term training over the last couple of months, and I'm also very happy to talk about the individuals themselves.

Let me tell the honourable member about Second Career. Let me tell him about William, a father of four who was a finishing operator at Shorewood Packaging for 22 years. Through Second Career, he is attending St. Lawrence College to become a child and youth worker. Let me tell you about Sherry Marsh, who was laid off as a sales person from a local furniture store. Second Career is helping her to pursue studies at Georgian College as a registered practical nurse. Sherry said, "Second Career is allowing me to pursue not just another job, but a job in a stable, secure field where workers get a pension and benefits." Let me tell the honourable member about Robert Gissing, who was laid off from various tech companies—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: You know, anywhere else in the world, if a program had a sign-up rate of less than one

half of one per cent, people would say, "There's a problem here." I know if my son came home from school and said, "I got less than one half of one per cent in a test," he would say, "I've got a problem, Dad." But the McGuinty government insists on continuing this fraud, continues to insist that the answer to hundreds of thousands of workers losing their job is a Second Career program that half the workers laid off can't get into. Most of those who lost their job lost it before Second Career was announced, and many who have tried to get into it find that they don't meet the exemption, the exception and the exclusion clauses that are part of it.

When is the McGuinty government going to level with laid-off workers? Your Second Career program may have involved lots of advertising, but it's a flop in terms of—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

1050

Hon. John Milloy: The honourable member knows he is wrong. He is wrong when he stands up and singles out one program of a series of programs and says that that is our only response to laid-off workers. Through Employment Ontario, 900,000 workers every year are receiving support. Of those, in the past year, 13,000 have come forward for short-term training.

Our government acknowledged that there was a problem—that we had no long-term training programs available—and over the course of the summer, we brought forward Second Career. At the time of launching Second Career, I made a commitment that we would continue to monitor the program and that, if we found there were obstacles, we would remove those obstacles. On Friday, I stood up and outlined a series of changes to the Second Career program that will make it more accessible so that we can have more Ontarians showing the good-news stories that I just shared with the Legislature.

POVERTY

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Acting Premier—and it's nice to know that the McGuinty government feels good about a Second Career program that has less than one half of 1% of laid-off workers signing up. But I want to ask about poverty. The Premier says that Ontarians understand that poverty can wait. I have news for the Premier. An Environics poll released today shows that more than 80% of Ontarians agree that government action on poverty is needed now and it's needed now more than ever. When will the McGuinty government listen and take action against poverty instead of telling impoverished people to wait, wait, wait?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the contrary: The honourable member wants to insist on what he thinks he heard, but it's not what was said and it's not reflective of the actions that are being taken. As the Premier had the opportunity to say in the Legislature last week, we are on track to deliver the poverty strategy, which has been the subject of what I might argue is an unprecedented amount of effort on behalf of a lot of the senior leadership in our

government. Even in these times, which recognize that there are challenges in the economy, we're committed to working in a way that sets real targets for the measurable improvement in the reduction of poverty in our society. The honourable member can claim as many times as he wants that this is not true, but these are the actions that we're taking. That strategy will be delivered in December, as was promised.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: The McGuinty government keeps talking about its long-term plan to reduce poverty. Last week, the McGuinty government released its fall economic statement, where it had an opportunity to take action. According to Environics, 90% of Ontarians want more affordable housing. Was there any action on affordable housing? No. Eighty-seven per cent want an above-poverty minimum wage. Any action on that? No. Eighty-five per cent want more low-cost, affordable child care. Any action on that? No. Seventy-seven per cent want increases to social assistance benefits. Any action on that? No.

When is the McGuinty government going to stop talking about poverty and actually start doing something about poverty?

Hon. George Smitherman: The honourable member wants to operate in an environment that pretends that the people of the province of Ontario aren't aware that each and every year there has been an increase in the minimum wage. The people of the province of Ontario, unlike the honourable member, don't pretend that there haven't been increases in social assistance. The people of the province of Ontario are very aware that the honourable member's own party makes great comments in question period, but when it comes to voting, doesn't stand up and support the development of programs like those that are targeted at children—the Ontario child benefit.

The people of the province of Ontario know that our government committed to bringing forward a poverty strategy. That is on track to be announced in December and will reflect our ongoing commitment to the targeted reduction of poverty in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Once again, the McGuinty government talks about something that might happen in the future. Yes, the child benefit might do something in 2012. All the McGuinty government has done this year is take away the back-to-school clothing allowance from the poorest kids in the province, and you're taking away the winter clothing allowance from the poorest kids in the province.

Minister, you'd be wise to recall something that happened in the last really terrible economic downturn—the Great Depression. Harry Hopkins, one of the people who had to deal with it in the United States, said, "People don't eat in the long run. They eat every day." What is your plan to take on poverty now, as it grows worse, instead of talking about, "In the long run, the McGuinty government might do something"? What's the action plan now?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the contrary, even John Campey, executive director of the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, said in March that it's reassuring to see that the government has responded to the calls for poverty reduction with some concrete initiatives. The focus on more employment training for Ontarians who are coping with the changing environment and more ESL funding and training for newcomers is recognition that a good job is one of the pathways out of poverty.

I heard the honourable member from Hamilton say in response to the name John Campey, "Well, he's a Liberal." The honourable member ought to get real on knowing whose voice is behind these issues. We're coming forward for the first time with a plan that has the opportunity for targeted reduction in poverty, but it supports initiatives that have been taken: Ontario child benefit; minimum wage increases; social housing assistance increases; \$100 million to affordable housing; a new dental program; student nutrition program funding doubled—all of these practical initiatives to help people—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a question for the Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services. On Thursday, I urged you to speak with your counterpart the Minister of Labour to represent the concerns of some 25,000 small businesses that have presented letters on the mandatory WSIB policy your government is poised to introduce. This would be a new cost for small business—some \$11,000 on average.

My question is simple: Did you discuss the issue with Minister Fonseca, and if so, what was the result of that conversation?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: What I can tell the member opposite is that I did meet with the CFIB and we had a wholesome discussion on this proposed legislation, if passed, how it would work and the phases it would go through.

We're trying to address a level playing field in construction. Right now it's not a level playing field. There are some who come on to construction sites that are not paying their fair share, not paying their premiums of insurance. We want to make sure that all those working on those construction sites are covered. We want to make sure that those workers, if they do get injured or hurt, are covered and they have benefits in place to take care of themselves.

I hope that the member can understand that and would come aboard to this good policy. This is an initiative that was backed by the Ontario construction industry, the secretariat, the WSIB. We have met with the Council of Ontario Construction Associations. They understand—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm asking the Minister of Small Business: Is he representing the interests of small business? I think you fail to realize just how serious this is for small business.

On the weekend, I attended a 65th wedding anniversary, an event where you don't usually get into too much politics. And what was the topic of discussion? Your mandatory coverage of WSIB.

This morning, before I got in—here is an e-mail I just received, and I'd like to quote from it: "It is difficult enough to keep the bottom line in the black, without the pending changes. Our rate is in the 10% range, which applied to what I take as a salary will be the best part of \$10,000. Removing that much from the bottom line would make me rethink the viability of these businesses." These business owners don't want your mandatory coverage, and frankly, they think it's just another money grab, another tax on small business.

Minister, last week I asked you if part of your mandate is to help small business. You said, "Absolutely." Well, why aren't you helping small business now?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Once again, I would say to this member that I cannot understand how he does not find that the importance of the health and safety of those workers on the construction site is paramount to all of this.

I want to just read him a quote. Doug Chalmers, director of Aluma Systems and past chair of the Sarnia Construction Association, said: "Congratulations; absolutely brilliant. This will make Ontario a safer workplace and improve the quality of life for all of us. This is about fairness, it's about health and safety, it's about levelling the playing field, it's about addressing the underground economic activity in construction."

I would hope that the member would get on board and get with it.

1100

YOUTH CRIME

Ms. Andrea Horwath: To the Acting Premier: Well over a year ago, the government asked Ontario's former Chief Justice Roy McMurtry and former Speaker Alvin Curling to prepare a report on how to address youth violence. Meanwhile, we see kids killing kids and stories of street violence hitting the headlines almost every day.

Mounting public concern is everywhere. Where is that report?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Attorney General.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I thank the member for the question. We're all looking forward to the report. We're all looking forward to the public release and discussion of the report. I want to thank, in advance, former Chief Justice McMurtry and former Speaker Alvin Curling for undertaking this task.

It's something that we all believe is extremely important for the future of our communities. We have taken steps as a government to invest in our communities, to make sure young people have opportunities to keep them

out of violent activity and gang activity to begin with. An approach this government has taken which is extremely important is to recognize that prevention is the best crime control approach. We're very much looking forward to the release of that report.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I would think many people are looking forward to the report. It's been over a year since they were commissioned to do the work.

We know that there are many, many government reports, however, that have been commissioned and they only sit on shelves, gathering dust. So today, will the Acting Premier pledge that recommendations that will come in this report will be implemented and that government is committed to providing the resources? Or is this another report that's destined to languish without funding and support while the roots of youth violence continue to spread unabated by your lack of action?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: We're very much looking forward to the release of the report. As everybody knows, they need to go through certain compilations and translation etc. before they're actually publicly released.

We're absolutely committed to ensuring that our young people have the opportunities that will enable them to reach their full potential. I talked about community investment funds. We have programs to ensure that our youth have employment and training opportunities, that my colleague the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities has been working very hard on; and access programs, to make sure that our young people have opportunities in colleges and universities and apprenticeship training. There are 100,000 more people in colleges and universities now than when we started; 150,000 of them are receiving grants or assistance of some form. This is access to future opportunities.

I'm looking forward to the report, as I know my friend is, and we'll be able to discuss how to move forward on this in the future.

SKILLS TRAINING

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, in June you announced a new Second Career program to help recently laid-off workers go back to school to get a new job. A program like this is crucial at a time when so many people are being laid off in the manufacturing sector and cannot find jobs that match their current skill sets. Training and education are becoming more and more important, and we know that we must reach out to as many people as possible, to make Ontario workers as competitive as possible in today's job market.

Over the past couple of weeks we've heard in this House criticism of Second Career and claims that this program is ineffective and inaccessible, even though I'm sure those who have taken advantage of the program would argue otherwise. Minister, what would you say to the constituents in my riding who have been laid off and

who are hesitant to apply to Second Career for fear they would not meet the criteria?

Hon. John Milloy: I appreciate the question because it gives me a chance to reiterate once again that there is support in the province of Ontario for laid-off workers through Employment Ontario; about 900,000 people a year come forward.

This government recognized, however, that within the variety of programs there was no program for long-term training—those interested in going to a community college or a private career college for longer-term training. Therefore, in June we announced the details of the Second Career program and set a target of 20,000 workers over the course of three years. Second Career assists with the costs associated with retraining, including tuition, books and living expenses.

At the time, we acknowledged that this was a new program—in fact, unique in Canada—and we were going to monitor it very closely to make sure there were no obstacles to workers coming forward. And Friday, at George Brown College, I was pleased to announce further changes to the system to enhance it and to remove some of these—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Thank you, Minister. The fact that you're making changes to make the program more accessible will be good news for many of my constituents.

I recently met with a constituent from my riding who applied for the program but was denied funding because he went back to work. After being laid off, he was forced to take on a minimum-wage job in order to make ends meet, and is now looking for help to set him on a new career path. He's very eager to upgrade his skills but cannot afford to take the time off work and pay to go to college, all the while taking care of his family. I'm sure that his story is not unlike other laid-off workers looking to apply for Second Career. I also know that many people are unable to apply for the program because they were laid off prior to the year cut-off. Could you please tell me and my constituents what you plan to do to expand access to this invaluable program?

Hon. John Milloy: Certainly. I'm very happy to provide some of the details of what we announced Friday to enhance Second Career and remove some of the obstacles to allow more people to go forward.

First, we're pushing back the entry date. If you've been laid off any time since January 2005, you can now apply for Second Career. This will be particularly helpful to workers in the forestry sector who have lost their jobs in the last few years. Secondly, we recognize that there are situations where people have taken temporary employment just to make ends meet. We believe that they should have access to training too, so we're going to open up Second Career to include them. Third, in cases where the need is great, we'll consider additional financial assistance beyond \$28,000, based on individual circumstances.

In addition to these three main changes, we're working to make the application process easier to build in more flexibility around career options.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the finance minister. As you know, sadly, Ontario now joins Prince Edward Island as the only province in all of Canada to be in the red. Your predecessor, Minister Sorbara, had always set aside a \$1-billion reserve and then made a commitment to increase that reserve to \$1.5 billion. Shockingly, when you knew there were storm clouds on the horizon, when you knew 2008 would be a rough year, you cut that commitment in half, put the reserve at \$750 million and reduced the contingency fund by \$160 million. If you had kept to the path of your previous finance minister, we'd be in surplus today. Isn't that the true reason why you're in the red, as of last week?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Unlike the member opposite, we made the choice in the budget to continue to invest in health care, education and infrastructure, and we think those are the appropriate decisions. We think that the \$1.1 billion that's going out to municipalities in the next couple of weeks is a very good use of public money. We think there were deficits in health care and education left by his government, including a \$5.5-billion deficit. So, yes, we did reduce the reserve last year, we did reduce the contingency in order to create jobs, and we'll see the cranes around Ontario. I'm sure we will be joined by some other governments fairly soon in the deficit category. We will continue to make the proper investments in the areas that I know are not a priority for him. But we think hiring teachers, nurses—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Well, there's the nub of the problem. When you knew or you should have known that the economy was heading downhill, when you saw all the signs in the States, when every bank and every economist were saying that tough times were ahead, you chose to reduce the financial cushions of the province. You cut, basically, the reserve in half and reduced your contingency fund, and now we find ourselves in the red.

After that initial grave error, what did Dwight Duncan and Dalton McGuinty choose to do? Spend, spend, spend. In the first two quarters of this year, some \$325 million in unbudgeted spending to make this deficit situation even worse, even though you knew the Bank of Montreal in June had projected that our economy would crawl at 0.2% at most.

Minister, was it not a mistake to go into the spend, spend, spend mode when you should have had prudent spending and tried to help create jobs in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We think that the \$3.9 billion in infrastructure was a good expenditure. We think that the \$660-million debt repayment was a good expenditure. We think that the investments in health care and edu-

cation were good. The member opposite will cut health care. He'll cut education. He'll lay off people at the very time we shouldn't be.

I'd remind him what Diane Francis of the National Post said to him the other day: "While I think the deficit is very minuscule considering the size of the budget and considering the mess the world is in, I believe, unlike other Conservatives and business people, that the role of government is appropriate, to be a shock absorber and run deficits if you hit a bump in the economic road."

We are pursuing a policy to protect jobs and investment. Ontario will be better because of it.

1110

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Across Ontario, homeowners are getting whacked by this government's broken property assessment system. Fixed-income seniors may be forced out of their lifelong homes. Your only solution to date is a paltry \$250 plan that certainly won't help them.

How will this help seniors like those highlighted in yesterday's Liberal newspaper, who live in Richmond Hill and who will now be whacked with property tax bills in excess of \$7,000 and \$9,000?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Again, the premise of the member's question is inaccurate. Assessment increases do not constitute property tax increases. The member likes to imply that they do; they don't.

The second point I would make to the member is that any increases as a result of this assessment will be phased in over four years.

The Ombudsman and a number of others have recognized the changes we've made to the system. We think the changes are appropriate. Assessment notices are continuing to go out across the province. But again, I stress to those people who are concerned that assessment increases do not constitute tax increases, and in terms of implementation, any assessment increase is to be implemented over four years.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Michael Prue: Perhaps the finance minister is not aware that when your home's property value goes up by \$200,000 and \$300,000, you can expect property tax increases.

The minister clearly will not admit that these four-year assessments are totally out of whack with the current economic climate. Properties are in fact losing value today, but assessments reflect values from January 1, 2008. Since the current economic tsunami, house prices have dropped by 10% or more in some locations. Fixed-income folks who are struggling to stay in their homes cannot bear this volatility and uncertainty.

Why won't this government consider keeping assessments at 2005 level values and freezing them there until properties are sold, as we have suggested?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: What the member proposes would have different tax assessments for identical prop-

erties on the same street. It just doesn't work well. I would remind him that over four years, increases that are on assessment rolls do not have to become property tax increases. The member knows full well that it's the tax rate times the assessment value that determines that. Tax rates can be adjusted to reflect the increase.

The final thing I would say: When given a chance to help senior citizens with their property taxes, this member voted against the senior citizen property tax credit. I would say, with respect, \$250 is a lot of money in the first year, rising to \$600. The member tries to have it both ways. He won't defend seniors and property taxpayers. This government has and will continue to do so, even if—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. David Zimmer: I too have a short but indeed important question for the Minister of Finance. Last week, I received a letter from Patricia Sillers, one of my constituents in Willowdale. She says in her letter, "Because I am a fixed-income pensioner living in Willowdale, I am worried about the new property assessment on my condominium. With the sudden downturn in the economy, my small nest egg has shrunk alarmingly, and the thought of my increased property taxes is truly scary.... There must be many folks in the same situation. This would be a terrible time to raise property taxes."

Speaker, through you to the minister, what are we going to do about this? It's a serious problem for fixed-income pensioners in Willowdale and Ontario.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member is quite right about assessment notices going out. Again, I introduced the—

Mr. Paul Miller: How come he's right and I'm wrong?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Well, unlike the NDP, he voted for the seniors' property tax credit. What a ridiculous lot over there.

I say to the member, he's right that an increase in assessment does not lead to a property tax increase. I thank him for supporting the seniors' property tax credit, which the NDP voted against three times. They know that this government protects and the NDP casts into the waves because they really don't care. This government did the seniors' property tax credit. It was the appropriate response, and we appreciated his support on that vote.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. David Zimmer: Minister, I read with interest this weekend in the Toronto Star the article on property assessments. I know it's not easy for homeowners to appeal their assessments. I hear a lot about that in the constituency office. It's a complicated process. People don't understand it; they don't understand the method, the math, and they don't understand some of the philosophy behind it. In fact, the Ombudsman has even conducted an investigation into this issue.

Minister, has anything happened to make it easier for homeowners to deal with their assessment appeal notices?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Yes. The member opposite will be aware that the Ombudsman did quite a sweeping look at MPAC and what MPAC involves. There were 21 recommendations. I am pleased to tell the member that we've implemented all of those recommendations, including reverse onus, which is something that we thought was the appropriate course of action to take.

I'll remind the member of what the Ombudsman himself said: "The Municipal Property Assessment Corp. (MPAC) and the government have come closer to Getting it Right ... by implementing my recommendations for reforming property assessment in Ontario.... newly introduced legislation will bring greater fairness to the system of property assessment and appeal."

Again, I stress that an increase in assessment does not necessarily mean an increase in property taxes, number one. Number two, the property tax credit for seniors like your constituent who corresponded with you will help people like that very directly. I only wish the NDP had voted for that instead of taking the kinds of—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is for the Minister of Small Business. Minister, in today's economic environment, where we learn daily about small business failures and job losses, are you and your government prepared to give fair and preferential treatment to Ontario and Canadian companies bidding on services and goods for your government in order to keep the jobs here and people off welfare?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I want to thank the member for asking this question.

Actually, our government has been working in a very systematic manner, since we took power in 2003, to make it easier for small businesses to sell to the government. We have made it easier for them to actually get onto the vendors' list so that they can be considered for business with the government. Not only that, but we have also taken steps to make it easier for them to sell to the government, that reduce the paperwork burden for them, so that it is not inconvenient for them to sell to the government.

I will be able to talk about more in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Well, Minister, I don't believe that it's working.

Recently, the Ministry of Correctional Services tendered an RFP for sweaters to be worn by Ontario law enforcement officials. Specifically, they did specify a garment that was to be made by Ingo, a Waterloo-based company, and they were identified for future procurement. Lo and behold, once the tendering process was complete, a decision was made to purchase the garments from Mexico.

Considering the turbulent economic times, does the minister not agree with me that you should be doing all you can to advocate for small businesses and look at a made-in-Ontario policy when possible?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: As I said earlier, the first step in selling any goods to the government is to make sure that you get on the vendors' list. The second step is that you have to then make a competitive bid. The third way we have made it easier for the small businesses is that in case they don't get the business in the first place, at least we tell them why they didn't get it so that the next time around they are in a more competitive position to bid for the government business. Do you know that has never happened under other governments, when the Conservatives were in power? We have made it much, much easier for them to get onto the vendors list and sell to the government. In cases where they fail, they know why they failed so that they can be in a better position to bid for the business the next time around.

I agree that we have to make sure that small businesses are in the position to get to some of the Ontario government business, because—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

1120

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Paul Miller: To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade—I'll give you a rest today, Speaker: Minister, last week in the *SooToday*, in an article by the MPP for Sault Ste. Marie, he claimed that \$23 million was approved through the Ministry of Economic Development to support the creation of a new pipe plant. Has this money been approved specifically for the creation of a new pipe plant? Has this program been approved?

Hon. Michael Bryant: I say to the member, he will be aware of the process that's in place. I obviously work closely with the member from Sault Ste. Marie to ensure that the various programs that are in place follow the procedures and programs in order to allow for an official announcement.

I appreciate that the member is standing up, presumably in support of this, and I know that the member from Sault Ste. Marie does as well. When it's appropriate for it to be publicly announced, we will certainly do that, but I want to add that this is a program that's going to benefit that community in a wide variety of ways. Obviously, the member is seeking to highlight that, and I appreciate that.

Mr. Paul Miller: The MPP for Sault Ste. Marie also said in his article, "Hopefully Essar Algoma Steel management and union can come to an agreement that would see a similar facility opened in Sault Ste. Marie." A few weeks ago, the president of Local 2251 met with Essar Steel Algoma, but there were no negative discussions like the MPP alludes to.

The person who can tell us if the \$23 million is slated for a pipe mill in Sault Ste. Marie is the minister. Will he

tell us now if a pipe mill will be located in Sault Ste. Marie?

Hon. Michael Bryant: I know that the member advocates on behalf of his community. Certainly the member for Sault Ste. Marie does as well. He has been doing so for the past five-plus years as the member, and he does a very good job.

Interjections.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I agree. He'll continue to do that. I know that the member certainly wouldn't want to be critical of a member of provincial Parliament standing up for his particular region and his riding. If he is adding his voice of support, we appreciate that. If he is seeking to criticize the member for standing up for his riding, I beg to disagree. The member of Sault Ste. Marie, Mr. Oraziotti, is doing a fantastic job advocating on behalf of his community. He works with all members of this government in order to get the best for his community, and we certainly all applaud him for that.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: My question is for the Minister of Government Services. As I'm sure is the case for most of my colleagues, many of my constituents own or work for small or medium-sized businesses. In fact, 99% of Ontario's firms are small and medium enterprises that generate over \$250 billion in economic activity annually. When small businesses are starting up in my riding or are in a position to expand, there is a certain number of permits and licences that are needed, not only from this level of government but from municipalities and the federal government as well. While these regulatory steps are necessary, the act of figuring out which ones apply to one's business endeavours can be overwhelming.

Minister, what is this government doing to make it easier for small businesses in Lambton-Kent-Middlesex to get on their feet or, as well, to expand?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'm pleased to answer this question at this time, especially given that October has been recognized as Small Business Month. The McGuinty government knows that many entrepreneurs can spend weeks trying to research all the permits and licences that they may need to expand their business. Having owned a small business myself, I understand this first-hand.

One of the ways that our government does offer help is with BizPal, which stands for business permits and licences. It's a free online service that saves businesses time by providing a customized list of the permits and licences they may need from time to time from all levels of government: municipal, provincial and federal. It all comes to them within minutes and it's offered up through Service Ontario. BizPal helps small businesses to be efficient and helps build a better relationship between government—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I'm glad to hear that this government is making strides in helping Ontario's small businesses, especially in these economically challenging times.

The minister mentioned that BizPal combines the permits and licences from all levels of government, including municipalities. I'm sure that municipalities in my riding appreciate the help in trying to streamline any permits and licensing that small businesses in our communities need. However, I would appreciate some assurance that BizPal is in fact helping our municipalities deal with potential overlap and inefficiencies and that it's working efficiently. Can the minister assure the House that BizPal is helping our municipalities and not creating another unnecessary burden on them?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Well, I sure can give that assurance. Small businesses have come to expect nothing less from the McGuinty government. I can tell you that, to date, there are some 66 Ontario municipalities, representing 54% of the province's population, which offer the BizPal service, with many others eager—in fact, they are lining up—to plug into this service. That's no surprise, because it's such a great service. We've heard great reactions from all over Ontario. From Muskoka, the mayor has said that this innovative online tool has simplified the process of obtaining business permits and other regulatory requirements.

I'm pleased to hear feedback like this as BizPal is launched in more and more municipalities. It's a service that businesses have come to expect from our government and it's one we're pleased to deliver.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Ted Arnott: My question is to the Minister of Small Business. Is the minister aware that his government's hostile business climate is forcing a 40-year-old manufacturing company in Mississauga, in the minister's own city, Plastmade Industries Ltd., to consider moving its assembly operations to Mexico?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Let me tell you, this is small business month, and I had the opportunity to go around and visit a lot of locations and see a lot of our small businesses in action. I'm very proud to say that our small businesses are actually doing well and are alive and are thriving.

Just to give you an example, last week, actually on Friday, I had the chance to visit Kawartha Lakes, along with the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. There I had the chance to visit five businesses in Kawartha Lakes which are doing extremely well.

There's no doubt that some businesses are facing some challenges, especially in the manufacturing sector, and our government has worked very closely with them to make sure that their needs get addressed. We have the programs to help them out, not only to actually sell their products abroad, but to become more efficient and productive in Ontario as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Well, it's obvious that the minister didn't tour Plastmade in Mississauga, as I did on October 17, touring this impressive facility and meeting its productive workforce. But it's a shrinking workforce. Plastmade now has 40 employees, down from over 100 a while ago.

The accumulated burden of this government's Liberal red tape is forcing small businesses out of the country or out of business entirely. We are hearing about the newly overzealous and authoritarian attitude within the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of the Environment, and the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board. Combined with this government's crushing tax burden and the uncertain economic climate, it's no surprise that companies like Plastmade are seeking alternatives in order to survive.

When will this minister stand up for small business, as is his mandate? When will he give small business a reason for hope in Ontario's economic future?

1130

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: The member opposite has quoted one business. Let me give you three examples in Mississauga of the companies that have been doing extremely well that I had the chance to visit last week.

Actually, I had the chance to visit a company called Icyne. They are in the insulation business. They have created a real niche market in that business, and this company has grown to become a \$100-million company.

Then I had the chance to visit Promotion, which is in the automation business. It used to be in the auto business, but now they're producing parts for the nuclear industry. So they have done a great transition in that business.

Then I had the chance to visit Methes, which is in the biofuel diesel business. They have actually created a real niche market in that business.

There is another company called 2Source in Mississauga, which has created a great niche in the bushings business.

So there are a lot of good businesses around that are doing extremely well and—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

PROPANE EXPLOSION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: To the Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services: The minister has a committee that's reviewing right now the storage, handling, location and transport of propane. Strangely, the role that industry self-regulation played in last August's propane explosion is not being examined at all. There's no mention of it in the public discussion document. Will the minister explicitly instruct the propane safety review to examine the Technical Standards and Safety Authority's model of self-regulation and self-governance?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: A couple of weeks ago, I actually asked the two prominent experts in Canada to look at propane rules and regulations, and that report is due in 45 days. I expect it to be in the first week of

November, and they are doing great work. Actually, I have asked both opposition critics to submit whatever they think is appropriate that this review needs to look at, and I encourage them to do it. Their mandate is to give me the recommendations so that we can improve propane safety, because safety comes first for us. We need to make sure that consumers are protected, our households are protected and the residents of Ontario are protected.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Maybe the minister doesn't open his mail, but I did send a letter of request asking him that very issue that I'm speaking to him about today, and that is the fact that we have to look at the entire governance structure, not just the regulations. The propane safety review is only focusing on the regulations, not the regulator itself.

Ontarians know that there's something fundamentally wrong with the regulator. It took a minister's order for the regulator to conduct an Ontario-wide compliance check, where it found—and we know this—that half of the province's large propane facilities are out of compliance. Seven posted immediate hazards as a result, yet the minister refuses to have his team of experts look at the regulator itself. Why won't the minister explicitly instruct, as I asked in the letter and as I'm asking again today, the propane safety review to examine the TSSA's self-regulation model?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: It's really interesting for this member to ask this question. This regulation model was started under the NDP, and the Conservatives implemented it.

Having said that, I think the TSSA over the years has done a very good job. I'm very proud of the fact that they have done that great job, but we need to make sure that Ontario residents are safe. That's why we ordered this review. I want to make sure that the review is conducted as thoroughly as possible so that the residents of Ontario are always safe. I'm glad for the kind of work they're doing, and I want to encourage the member to submit the kinds of recommendations they have to the panel.

Interjection.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I said "to the panel."

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My question is to the Minister of Research and Innovation. Menova Energy Inc., a company which is based in Ottawa, is a 100% Canadian-owned-and-operated company committed to providing affordable solar energy solutions for the industrial, commercial and institutional markets. Menova's Power-Spar system is a technology which provides solar electricity, heating and lighting solutions. The platform is compatible with geothermal and thermal air conditioning applications. The key benefits of the Power-Spar system are green, zero-emission generation of heat and electricity; immunity from rising energy costs, since the price of energy from the sun will not escalate with time; amortize energy costs at about 50% of what consumers currently

pay for propane and electric heat; and a reliable and independent system that assists your office or business to function without interruption during power shortages, high costs, peak demand or blackouts.

Can the minister please explain what our government is doing to foster green technology companies, such as Menova, in the province?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank my friend for the question in regard to Menova. The new economy in the 21st century is going to be green. The question is, where is that commercialization going to happen? Menova is a great example of the types of companies that are building out right now in the province of Ontario. Menova is due to an Ottawa-based innovation in regard to a new product called the Power-Spar. That Power-Spar is being installed at the new Wal-Mart in Markham, one of the largest ones in the world. It's a demonstration plant for Wal-Mart but it's also part of our innovation demonstration funding.

I was talking to the president and he said, "This" project is a result "... of Ontario's growing world leadership in solar energy. The Menova technology was developed in Ontario and will remain in Ontario thanks to the forward-looking policies and commitment from this provincial government"—Dave Gerwing, president of Menova Energy Inc.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for question period has ended.

I wish to inform the House that the ruling and response to the point of order raised by the Minister of Tourism on Thursday last will be given this afternoon prior to orders of the day. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1136 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Norm Miller: The McGuinty government has announced it will exercise prudence through uncertain financial times. I would like to inform the government members opposite of the meaning of "prudent" from the Canadian Oxford Dictionary: "(1) careful to provide for the future." "(2) discreet or cautious; circumspect." "(3) having or exercising good judgment."

Let's take a look at some examples of this government's prudent spending: \$6 million to remove the "C" from the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. logo; \$2.3 million for the opening gala of Caesars Windsor casino—that's in addition to the \$400 million for casino renovations; \$2 million for the incomplete report by Alvin Curling on youth violence; \$219,000 to redesign the Ontario trillium logo so it looks like either the Liberal Party logo or three men in a tub—one or the other; \$200,000 by the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal in court costs to try to gag lottery fraud victim Bob

Edmonds; \$600,000 to fight parents of autistic children in court.

The question is, is it prudent to increase overall government spending from \$68 billion to \$96 billion in good times so there's no money left for bad times? The answer is, absolutely no. Shame on the McGuinty government for not being better guardians of taxpayers' hard-earned money.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: It gives me great pleasure to rise today and speak to this House about our government's initiatives in ensuring worker safety across Ontario. Ontario's workers are among the most productive in this nation, and our government is committed to having the highest safety standards to protect workers and their families. I know that this is of critical importance in my own community of Etobicoke-Lakeshore.

As a key part of our injury prevention strategy, inspectors blitzed industrial workplaces over the last month to eliminate specific hazards that could lead to falls. Prior safety blitzes have already yielded tremendous results for both employees and for businesses.

The Ministry of Labour compliance program that ran from April 1, 2004, to March 31, 2008, reduced the workplace injury rate by 20%, more than 50,000 incidents. Because of the drop in the annual rate of lost-time injuries, employers have avoided about \$5 billion in direct and indirect costs during the last four years.

Reduced injuries also lead to less strain on the health care system and fewer workers off the job, more productive communities and more family-friendly workplaces. They also increase productivity for Ontario's economy.

The McGuinty government recognizes the skill and value of Ontario's workers, and while there is more to do, our government will continue to work hard to ensure the safety of workers across the province, in each of our communities and in each of our families.

LEFTY THE GOOSE

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: As I'm sure you all know, I don't usually stand up to defend a lefty, but today I want to talk about a lefty in my riding. This lefty has garnered much public sympathy and I've had more than 80 calls and e-mails to my office to save Lefty.

To those members of the third party who think I may be standing up for one of them, I apologize. The lefty I'm speaking about today is a much higher form of life—a Canada goose that lives in Paul Lindsay Park in Stittsville—so named because it is missing its right wing. Lefty is unable to fly south for the winter, causing many people to worry it will freeze or starve.

As I said, I've received more than 80 calls and e-mails about Lefty last week, so I am working with the Canadian Wildlife Service, an agency of Environment Canada, which is responsible for migratory birds, to find a way to help poor Lefty.

I want to take this opportunity to thank those residents of Stittsville who have contacted my office about Lefty and let them know that migratory birds are not a responsibility of the province but of the federal government, but I am doing my best to make sure their concerns are heard by that government and something is done for Lefty.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: The October 2007 temporary care assistance directive, under "Duration of Care," stated its intent to be available to children under 18 years of age for as long as they require it, and that it may be only needed for weeks or it may be needed for years. This has been deleted from the new policy.

It also said that an adult providing temporary care may be a person awarded legal guardianship or custody by a court but has no legal obligation to support the child, and can include both temporary and permanent orders.

The July 2008 policy changes so that the existence of any legal custody order, whether it be permanent or temporary, is grounds to be denied this assistance. In every case where grandparents are raising their grandchildren, they always face their grandchildren being taken away by the parents, even with a custody order; it's always temporary.

Also, the new July directive uses "settled intent" as the grounds to deny TCA: the child's length of stay in the home; physical accommodation in the home for the child; the existence of a legal custody order; involvement in medical, educational and recreational activities of the child; and/or ongoing decisions about the health and well-being of the child.

A foster parent, unrelated, who receives \$900 a month as a caregiver is expected to be involved in all of these usual child-rearing activities, but a related grandparent who does these same things, who receives \$231 for the first child and \$188 for each additional child, under the new directive faces being cut off from this meagre subsistence funding.

This financial attack on grandparents, these unsung heroes trying to raise their grandchildren as part of their—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Member from Eglinton-Lawrence.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Mike Colle: Many workers in my riding of Eglinton-Lawrence and many workers in the city of Toronto are perplexed as to why they are not eligible for employment insurance. Many of these workers have paid into employment insurance for years and years, yet when they try to apply for insurance benefits, they are told they do not qualify because they live in Ontario.

The question I have is, why is it that the federal employment insurance surplus now stands at a total of over \$54 billion that the workers have paid into, yet the workers, when they ask for a contribution back to them in

insurance while they try to find another job, are not eligible? They say they're eligible in Nova Scotia, they are eligible in Quebec, they are eligible in PEI, yet in Ontario, if you're out of work, you can't get employment insurance.

They think this is unfair. They have asked all of us in the province of Ontario who sit here in this Legislature to stand up on their behalf and ask that they be treated, in these hard times, like workers in other provinces.

The question is, why do the workers in Ontario not qualify for employment insurance when they have already contributed to it?

GO TRANSIT

Mr. Ted Arnott: The trains that take people to work every day are critical to our economy, environment and quality of life. That's why I was pleased this spring when GO Transit announced its environmental assessment to extend rail service from Georgetown through Acton to Guelph and Kitchener-Waterloo. Working with the member for Kitchener-Waterloo, we have supported this vision for years.

Even though the McGuinty Liberals' financial mismanagement has weakened our economy, the need for this GO service extension remains well established. If the McGuinty government demands that municipalities adhere to its Places to Grow population growth targets, it has no excuse to delay this crucial transportation infrastructure project. It's crucial because of worsening traffic congestion, the still-high cost of gasoline, and our environmental obligations to future generations.

In a meeting I convened with representatives from GO Transit and the town of Halton Hills on October 9 here at Queen's Park, we discussed the many merits of this project. Mayor Rick Bonnette, Councillor John Duncan, and Director of Infrastructure Services Chris Mills and I all made a compelling case for this project, including a new stop in the Acton/Rockwood area. But without a commitment from the government of Ontario, these new trains will never even leave the station.

Future generations will look back and ask of us: Did we act? If not, why not? I urge the Minister of Transportation to act. I urge him to commit to make this project a goal.

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UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: Born and raised in Kitchener-Waterloo, I am proud to acknowledge that today is the University of Waterloo's Deans' Day here at Queen's Park.

The University of Waterloo celebrated its 50th anniversary last year. It's also my alma mater—St. Jerome's College, University of Waterloo. Deans' Day is an opportunity for the deans of various faculties to make themselves available all day at Queen's Park to meet with members and ministry staff and pose the question: "What

can we do to better serve your needs?"—a truly progressive approach in this global knowledge market.

The president of the university and vice chancellor is David Johnston, who is here meeting with ministries all day. He is joined today by a large delegation of deans, over 15 university staff and faculty, to whom I personally would like to say thank you.

The University of Waterloo was founded 50 years ago on the forward-looking premise that, with the help of community and business leaders, they would create a program to train engineers and technicians—not only classroom instruction but also with co-operative practical experience. This continues, with the training of highly qualified people on a global level: proof positive, in this competitive, knowledge-based global economy, that the University of Waterloo continues to be a world leader.

It's with great pleasure that we welcome these world leaders to Queen's Park today.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mr. Phil McNeely: The McGuinty government is setting the most aggressive wait time targets for general surgeries in Canada as part of an expansion of its successful wait times strategy. We are the first government to disclose wait times in Ontario's hospitals, available at www.ontariowaittimes.com. That's why I am proud of our government for expanding our strategy so that wait times continue to decline.

Since 2003, wait times in five key areas have been reduced: cataract surgery by 63%, down 195 days; hip replacements by 52%, down 181 days; knee replacements by 51%, down 228 days; cancer surgery by 19%, down 15 days; angiography by 53%, down 30 days; angioplasty by 50%, down 14 days; MRI by 18%, down 22 days; and CT scans by 46%, 31 days less. Our wait times strategy is working, and more Ontarians are getting the care they need sooner.

What's more, the Champlain LHIN is receiving over \$1.8 million from our government to fund an additional 1,477 surgeries. Minister Caplan was in town recently to announce that. The Ottawa Hospital is receiving more than \$156,000 to fund 26 more surgeries.

Thanks to our government for showing real leadership on wait times and giving our LHINs the money needed to fund more surgeries in our communities.

PREMIER'S AWARDS FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: It gives me great pleasure to rise in the House to inform members that nominations are now being accepted for the Premier's Awards for Teaching Excellence.

Each school day, parents hand over their most precious gift—their children—to teachers. With this gesture of trust comes the challenge of guiding our youth to becoming effective, empowered and creative adults. The McGuinty government commends the work that

teachers and school board staff do in helping students to reach their full potential, and the Premier's Awards are a great way to recognize those individuals who make a difference in education.

Starting today, parents, students, educators and community members can nominate an outstanding educator or support staff worker for an award. The deadline for nominations is January 31, 2009.

The Minister of Education recently launched the third year of this highly successful program that, over the last two years, has seen more than 2,000 nominations be received and 30 educators and support staff workers be recognized with this prestigious award.

These awards signify the McGuinty government's commitment to our education system and understanding that teachers are its backbone. So I encourage all members in the House and all Ontarians to recognize the efforts of Ontario's teachers, not just until January 30 but throughout the whole year.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT ACT (CHILD PASSENGERS ON MOTORCYCLES), 2008 LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LE CODE DE LA ROUTE (ENFANTS PASSAGERS SUR DES MOTOCYCLETTES)

Ms. Jacek moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 117, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the driving and operation of motorcycles with child passengers / *Projet de loi 117, Loi modifiant le Code de la route afin d'interdire la conduite et l'utilisation de motocyclettes transportant des enfants comme passagers.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Ms. Helena Jacek: The bill amends the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit driving or operating a motorcycle on a highway while a person under the age of 14 is a passenger on the motorcycle with a view to promoting safety on Ontario's roads and protecting youth from preventable injuries.

PETITIONS

EMERGENCY DISPATCH SERVICES

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition with hundreds of signatures to do with 911 services in Parry Sound-Muskoka. It reads:

"Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is considering relocating emergency ambulance and fire dispatch services currently provided by Muskoka Ambulance Communications Service to the city of Barrie; and

"Whereas up to 40% of all calls received are from cellphones from people unfamiliar with the area; and

"Whereas Parry Sound-Muskoka residents have grave concerns about the effect on emergency response times if dispatch services are provided by dispatchers who are not familiar with the area; and

"Whereas 16 Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care-funded jobs, held by qualified communication officers from local communities, may be lost as a result of the relocation of dispatch services to the city of Barrie,

"Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario put the safety, health and economic concerns of the people of Parry Sound-Muskoka ahead of government efficiency interests and ensure that emergency dispatch services continue to be provided locally by Muskoka Ambulance Communications Service."

I support this petition.

HOSPICES

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition from the Hospice Association of Ontario.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas hospices on church or hospital property do not pay taxes;

"Whereas hospices are not-for-profit organizations providing emotional, spiritual and bereavement support and respite care to terminally ill individuals;

"Whereas a residential hospice (usually about 8 to 10 beds) provides around-the-clock care to terminally ill patients and support to their families;

"Whereas hospice services are provided free of charge;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to allow hospices across the province to be exempt from municipal taxes."

I support this and I'll affix my name to it.

FERTILITY TREATMENT

Mr. Pat Hoy: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the prevalence and growing incidence of infertility in our population is a medical issue that demands the attention of our public health care system and should be placed on the agenda for funding;

"Whereas fertility treatment, including in vitro fertilization, is a proven medical solution that is unfairly limited to those with the financial means to pursue it and that it should receive significant coverage through the Ontario health care system as soon as possible;

"Whereas in vitro fertilization should be fully funded when deemed medically necessary, without discrimination based on cause or gender; and

"Whereas it is long overdue that financial assistance for fertility treatment be offered to Ontarians;

"We, the undersigned residents of the province of Ontario, request that the Ontario provincial government address this important issue. We strongly support the inclusion of financial assistance by the Ontario Ministry of Health under the Ontario health care program for all fertility treatment for Ontarians, male and female."

I've signed this petition, along with folks from Tilbury, North Buxton, Cottam, Wheatley and Chatham.

LOGGING ROUTE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with forestry and logging trucks going through the village of Restoule. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Nipissing forest management plan proposes to use Hawthorne Drive in Restoule, which features a single-lane bridge and narrow and steep sections; and

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"Whereas area residents have grave concerns about community safety, traffic speed, truck noise and general wear and tear of Hawthorne Drive and the bridge in the village of Restoule; and

"Whereas the proposed route travels past the Restoule Canadian Legion and two churches; and

"Whereas alternative routes are possible via Odorizzi Road and Block 09-056;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario put the safety and concerns of the people of Restoule ahead of logging interests and ensure an alternate route is selected for the Nipissing forest management plan."

I support this petition.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm pleased to introduce this petition in respect to Bill 33, affectionately known as a grandparents' bill. The petition reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents, as requested in Bill 33, put forward by" the member from Niagara Falls.

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to

include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

I'm pleased to sign my signature in support of this bill.

WORKPLACE HARASSMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas workplace harassment (physical and psychological) and violence need to be defined as violations of the Occupational Health and Safety Act so that it is dealt with as quickly and earnestly by employers as other health and safety issues and;

"Whereas employers will have a legal avenue/obligation to deal with workplace harassment and violence in all its forms, including psychological harassment, and;

"Whereas Bill 29 would make it law to protect workers from workplace harassment by giving workers the right to refuse to work after harassment has occurred, require an investigation of allegations of workplace-related harassment, and oblige employers to prevent further occurrences of workplace-related harassment;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to treat workplace harassment and violence as a serious health and safety issue by passing MPP Andrea Horwath's Bill 29, which would bring workplace harassment and violence under the scope of the Occupational Health And Safety Act."

I agree with it, have signed it and send it to the table with page Emily.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition here that was circulated by Kay Dryden of Falconer Drive in Meadowvale, Streetsville. It is to the Ontario Legislative of Assembly. It's about the western Mississauga ambulatory surgery centre, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I am pleased to sign and support this petition and to ask page Helen to carry it for me.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Mike Colle: I've got a petition against illegal guns in cars.

To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the growing number of unlawful firearms in motor vehicles is threatening innocent citizens and our police officers;

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and being found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, entitled the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I support this petition and I affix my name to it.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Jeff Leal: I'm very pleased today to introduce a petition on behalf of Heather Hughes, who lives in Mississauga, Ontario.

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures

that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I agree with this petition and will sign it and give it to page Laura.

LUPUS

Mr. Kim Craiton: I'm pleased to introduce this petition. As you know, October is Lupus Awareness Month. The petition reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas systemic lupus erythematosus is under-recognized as a global health problem by public health professionals and governments, driving the need for greater awareness; and

"Whereas medical research on lupus and efforts to develop safer and more effective therapies for the disease are underfunded in comparison with diseases of other comparable magnitude and severity; and

"Whereas no safe and effective drugs for lupus have been introduced in more than 40 years. Current drugs for lupus are very toxic and can cause other life-threatening health problems that can be worse than the primary disease;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to assist financially with media campaigns to bring about knowledge of systemic lupus erythematosus and the signs and symptoms of this disease to all citizens of Ontario.

"We further petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide funding for research currently being undertaken in lupus clinics throughout Ontario."

I'm pleased and really proud to sign my signature in support of this petition.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just want to remind members, and I've made this reminder on a number of occasions, we do need to look out for and ensure the health and safety of our interpreters. When you have your BlackBerry on your desk and you are speaking and your BlackBerry goes off, we can all hear this hum in the room. The hum is one thing, but we need to think about our interpreters, because that hum is very much humming in their ears. We do not want to cause ear damage or loss of hearing to our interpreters. So I would just caution and remind all members that if you're going to be speaking, leave your BlackBerry outside, in the galleries, so that there's no chance of it going off.

The member from Simcoe North.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the government-appointed supervisor of the Huronia District Hospital (HDH) has recommended a merger of HDH with the Penetanguishene General Hospital (PGH);

"Whereas the supervisor recommended changes to the governance of the hospital to eliminate community memberships and the democratic selection and governance of the hospital board and directors based on an ideology and not on the wishes of the community;

"Whereas the supervisor has also recommended the splitting up and divestment of the mental health centre in Penetanguishene, creating uncertainty in the future of mental health beds and services; and

"Whereas hospital mergers and restructuring under the local health integration network can result in a loss in the total number of hospital beds and services provided to a community,

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We call on the government of Ontario to

"Protect the current level of beds and services at all sites in Midland and Penetanguishene; and

"Protect the community memberships and the democratic governance of the new hospital created by the merger of HDH and PGH."

I'll sign this.

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POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition to the Parliament of Ontario. I would join my colleague from Newmarket-Aurora who often reads this, and it goes as follows:

"Whereas the legacy of Pope John Paul II reflects his lifelong commitment to international understanding, peace and the defence of equality and human rights;

"Whereas his legacy has an all-embracing meaning that is particularly relevant to Canada's multi-faith and multicultural traditions;

"Whereas, as one of the great spiritual leaders of contemporary times, Pope John Paul II visited Ontario during his pontificate of more than 25 years and, on his visits, was enthusiastically greeted by Ontario's diverse religious and cultural communities;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to grant speedy passage into law of the private member's bill An Act to proclaim Pope John Paul II Day" in Ontario.

I'm pleased to sign this and to ask page Kevin to carry it for me.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for petitions has ended.

OPPOSITION DAY MOTION

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On Thursday October 23, 2008, the Minister of Tourism, Ms. Smith, rose on a point of order to express her concerns about the opposition day motion that appeared on that day's orders and notices paper and that is scheduled for debate tomorrow. The motion calls for a public inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the release on bail of an individual who is named in the motion. The member was of the view that the motion, which stands in the name of the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Runciman, violates the sub judice convention as well as the sub judice provision in our standing orders. The member for Whitby-Oshawa, Mrs. Elliott, also spoke to the matter, and I have also reviewed the written submission of the Leader of the Opposition.

Having had the opportunity to review the members' submissions in Thursday's Hansard, other recent Hansards, the written submission of the Leader of the Opposition, previous rulings and precedents, and the parliamentary authorities on sub judice, I am now ready to rule on the point of order.

Let me begin by reviewing the meaning of sub judice. As I indicated in an address to the House on May 8, 2008:

"Sub judice, in brief, is a voluntary restriction on the part of a legislative body to refrain from discussing matters that are before a judicial or quasi-judicial body. In other words, it is a self-imposed restriction that the Legislative Assembly places upon itself so as to avoid prejudice to a judicial case. At its core is the principle that the separation between legislative and judicial bodies is to be respected."

As the Leader of the Opposition points out in his written submission, Ontario Speakers have generally been predisposed to giving considerable leeway to members who exercise their parliamentary responsibilities and privileges—for example, when they introduce bills, move motions, place oral questions, present petitions, table written questions and participate in debate pursuant to the standing orders. This predisposition is tantamount to a presumption, albeit a rebuttable one, that the member should not be unduly fettered in the exercise of his or her parliamentary responsibilities and privileges.

My responsibility as Speaker in the case at hand is to determine, first, whether the opposition motion offends our sub judice rule, and then whether it offends our sub judice convention, and so I shall address each issue in turn.

Though a strict interpretation of standing order 23(g) would limit the rule to "debate," in my view this does not necessarily save a motion from its application.

A motion provides the context of the debate and is the prelude to it. A motion is not exempt from debate—quite obviously—so it must be subject to the rules of debate. I am therefore satisfied that the motion is not exempt from being looked at by me in the light of the standing order. Nevertheless, even if I were to accept an argument to the

contrary, this is moot because I still must turn to whether the motion offends the sub judice convention.

I begin by noting that, in other jurisdictions, the convention does apply to motions. For example, Marleau and Monpetit's House of Commons Procedure and Practice states as follows at page 534:

"During debate, restrictions are placed on the freedom of members of Parliament to make reference to matters awaiting judicial decisions in the interests of justice and fair play. Such matters are also barred from being the subject of motions or questions in the House."

In a similar vein, the UK House of Commons has a sub judice rule that codifies its convention. According to page 437 of the 23rd edition of Erskine May, it applies to "any motion, debate or question."

In addition, the Australian House of Representatives Practice states the following at page 505 of the fifth edition:

"Notwithstanding its fundamental right and duty to consider any matter if it is thought to be in the public interest, the House imposes a restriction on itself in the case of matters awaiting or under adjudication in a court of law. This is known as the sub judice convention. The convention is that, subject to the right of the House to legislate on any matter, matters awaiting adjudication in a court of law should not be brought forward in debate, motions or questions."

The application of the convention to motions has been specifically accepted in Ontario by virtue of a ruling that can be found at page 305 of the Journals for June 21, 2006. I too accept the view that motions are subject to our sub judice convention.

In so doing, I am cognizant of what happened on May 14, 2001, a day when there was a debate on an opposition day motion seeking a commission of inquiry into the 1995 shooting death of Dudley George at Ipperwash Provincial Park. No point of order was raised on the orderliness of that motion, but it is noteworthy that while there was an ongoing civil proceeding at the time of the debate, related criminal proceedings had been fully disposed of. Parliamentary authorities are in agreement that the sub judice rule and convention are more relevant to criminal proceedings than to civil proceedings because there is more potential for prejudice to the former compared to the latter. Moreover, the motion was worded in a general way; it simply called for an inquiry into the incident.

In his written submission, the Leader of the Opposition also referred to an opposition day motion that was debated on November 28, 2006. This motion called on the government to make certain changes to the justice system, including the bail system. Like the Ipperwash motion, it did not identify the name of any individual who might be involved in an ongoing court proceeding.

In the case at hand, I appreciate the efforts of the member for Whitby—Oshawa to create a workaround on the issue before me. The member suggests that the debate on the motion could focus on general application of the rules regarding the apprehension of persons charged with

serious criminal offences, instead of on the specifics of any case before the courts.

The difficulty that I have with this approach is that it cannot be reconciled with the motion. This motion not only does not address the general application of such rules, but it also identifies, in every one of its clauses, the names of individuals associated with a very serious incident that is still before the criminal courts. It also draws conclusions on certain evidence and on the actions of officials involved in the administration of criminal justice in Ontario. Absent these specifics and written a very different way, it is likely such a motion could have proceeded, as was the case with the opposition day motion about the justice system in Ontario that was put forward in November 2006.

However, we are dealing with the motion as it is written. So for the reasons I already cited, I am satisfied that the presumption against the application of the convention has been rebutted. I find that the motion offends the sub judice convention in that it offers much potential for prejudice to an ongoing criminal proceeding, and so I am ordering that the motion be removed from the Orders and Notices paper.

In his written submission, the Leader of the Opposition made remarks about the placement of oral questions in past question periods, including the placement of questions in recent question periods on the same matter as that mentioned in the opposition day motion. As I have indicated, oral questions are approached differently than motions. However, I do have concerns about recent questions that address the same matter as the opposition day motion. I note that the Attorney General in every instance declined to address the substantive question on the basis that the matters being raised were still before the courts. The Attorney General's approach was consistent with the pre-existing practice. In a ruling at page 305 of the Journals for June 21, 2006, the Speaker addressed this very issue in the following terms:

"The voluntary nature of the sub judice convention means that every member must be careful to refrain from making comments in debate, motions or questions.

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"In debate, this self-regulation is essential. In oral question period, Speakers largely rely upon the ministers to whom questions are addressed to decide if further discussion of the matter might prejudice a matter before a court, or other judicial or quasi-judicial body, or tribunal. And while ministers have every right to decline to answer a question which in their view rubs up against the sub judice convention, members in framing questions must also be cognizant of their responsibility in this regard.

"Indeed, the very posing of a question may cross the sub judice line, but the conundrum for all is that, regardless of the subsequent actions of the Speaker or anyone else, the damage may already have been done....

"[T]he sub judice convention relies for its effectiveness upon the goodwill of all members in voluntarily refraining from discussing matters before courts or judicial bodies. I think it is worth reminding members

that extreme caution should always be the order of the day whenever such matters arise as a topic of discussion in this chamber."

I also want to quote from paragraph 192 of the 1999 First Report of the UK Parliament's Joint Committee on Parliamentary Privilege, as follows:

"It is important that a debate, a committee hearing, or any other parliamentary proceeding should not prejudice a fair trial, especially a criminal trial. But it is not only a question of prejudicing a fair trial. Parliament is in a particularly authoritative position and its proceedings attract much publicity. The proper relationship between Parliament and the courts requires that the courts should be left to get on with their work. No matter how great the pressure at times from interest groups or constituents, Parliament should not permit itself to appear as an alternative forum for canvassing the rights and wrongs of issues being considered by the judicial arm of the state on evidence yet to be presented and tested. Although the risk of actual prejudice is greater in a jury trial, it would not be right to remove appeal cases or other cases tried without a jury from the operation of the rule. Restrictions on media comment are limited to not prejudicing the trial, but Parliament needs to be especially careful: It is important constitutionally, and essential for public confidence, that the judiciary should be seen to be independent of political pressures. Thus, restrictions on parliamentary debate should sometimes exceed those on media comment."

I hope that these statements offer members some helpful guidance when they exercise their parliamentary responsibilities and privileges in the future.

Before concluding, I want to address the timing of this point of order last Thursday. I think it would have been preferable and helpful to the Speaker if the point had been raised when the Leader of the Opposition, in whose name the motion stands, was in the chamber, so that he could have listened and responded to that point of order. Members will know that a point of order does not require notice and that the Speaker cannot direct that such a courtesy be extended. Moreover, notice is not often feasible, since a point of order has to be raised at the earliest opportunity, regardless of whether or not a member affected by it is in the House. Nevertheless, I am left with a lingering unease. I think there was room for greater consideration in this case, especially since opposition day motions are such an important means by which the opposition holds the government of the day to account.

I thank the Minister of Tourism and the member from Whitby-Oshawa for speaking to the matter last Thursday and the Leader of the Opposition for his written submission. Again, I hope that this ruling offers all members some guidance on sub judice issues.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: We respect your findings and certainly will not take issue with them. But in anticipation of that possible finding on your part, we did draft an alternative with no reference to specific cases, worded in a very general way which essentially is calling for a public inquiry into Ontario's bail system. I would

ask for unanimous consent that we can file that and use this revised motion for discussion and debate in the allocated time period tomorrow afternoon.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The Attorney General on the same point of order.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I haven't seen the motion and I'm wondering if we could address this in terms of unanimous consent later in the day when I've had an opportunity to take a look at it and consult with the House leader.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Welland on the same point of order.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I should indicate that I have had the opportunity to see it, and not for any particular reason other than the fact that I have. It's the view of the NDP that the proposed motion defers to the Speaker's ruling in every respect, and I want to indicate that New Democrats will be prepared to give our unanimous consent to its replacing the current motion on the order paper.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: If I could just have the opportunity to have a look at it and consult with the House leader, I would be most appreciative. Apparently, there's a House leaders' meeting today at 2 p.m., I'm told, so maybe if we could address this shortly after that. And if I could just ask the Speaker: I don't know the appropriate procedure, but maybe after that there's an opportunity to call for unanimous consent again after the House leaders have had the opportunity to have a discussion.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would appreciate the House leaders looking at this issue at the earliest opportunity, and if that opportunity presents itself this afternoon, I'm sure the Speaker will allow for that notice of motion. But I do need to qualify that, notwithstanding any unanimous consent that may be given, the motion will certainly still be reviewed by the Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET MEASURES AND INTERIM APPROPRIATION ACT, 2008 (NO. 2)

LOI DE 2008 SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES ET L'AFFECTATION ANTICIPÉE DE CRÉDITS (NO 2)

Mr. Bentley, on behalf of Mr. Duncan, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 114, An Act respecting Budget measures, interim appropriations and other matters, to amend the Ottawa Congress Centre Act and to enact the Ontario Capital Growth Corporation Act, 2008 / Projet de loi 114, Loi concernant les mesures budgétaires, l'affectation anticipée de crédits et d'autres questions, modifiant la Loi sur le Centre des congrès d'Ottawa et édictant la Loi de 2008 sur la Société ontarienne de financement de la croissance.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I am in the delightful position of indicating to the Speaker that I am going to share virtually all of my time with the member from Ottawa Centre. In fact, I'm anxious to hear what he has to say.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Member from Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thanks for the vote of confidence from the Attorney General and from the honourable member from Nepean—Carleton. I'm looking forward to what I say as well in the next 20 or 25 minutes.

I'm pleased to rise today and speak about Bill 114, the Budget Measures and Interim Appropriation Act, 2008. On March 25, my colleague the Honourable Dwight Duncan rose to present the McGuinty government's fifth provincial budget. Through measures in the 2008 Ontario budget, we continue to implement our government's economic plan with a broad approach to stimulate investment and address the economic challenges faced by our province today. It was the first budget of the McGuinty government's second mandate.

The 2008 budget continued our strategic investments in Ontario's greatest strength, its people. Since 2003, the McGuinty government has invested in programs and services to help Ontario's people and families reach their full potential: publicly funded education, universal health care, modern infrastructure, support for vulnerable citizens and a greener Ontario.

Just talking about my own community in Ottawa, we have seen tremendous growth and investment in that great city of ours. Over half a billion dollars has been invested in our health care sector in Ottawa, with expansion taking place virtually at every single hospital that lies within that city boundary. Montfort, CHEO, the Ottawa Hospital—both the general and the civic campus—and the Queensway Carleton Hospital have seen the major investment and expansion that is taking place.

In post-secondary education—I have alluded to many times in this chamber that Carleton University is in my riding of Ottawa Centre, and the University of Ottawa is next door in Ottawa—Vanier—there has been a 20% increase in the operating budget for post-secondary education in Ottawa. Besides the two universities, we've got La Cité collégiale and Algonquin College as well in the city of Ottawa.

In our elementary and secondary education, we've seen a 20% per pupil increase in investment in our school boards. These have been tremendous investments since 2000, since the McGuinty government took office, in the city of Ottawa.

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The McGuinty government has been able to support these priorities in Ottawa and across the province to help people and families because of its disciplined and prudent fiscal management and because of our five-point economic plan. This comprehensive and balanced plan continues to respond to the needs of individuals, families

and businesses by investing in skills and knowledge, including enhancements to the Second Career strategy; investing in infrastructure, including \$1.1 billion to municipalities this year alone through the Investing in Ontario Act, 2008; and through strategic tax cuts for business to encourage investment, including retroactively eliminating the capital tax for manufacturing- and resource-based sectors, resulting in a \$190-million rebate right at the time when these companies need it the most; strengthening the environment for innovation, including proposing a 10-year tax break for new businesses that commercialize Canadian research through the Ideas for the Future Act; and lastly, forming key partnerships at home and internationally.

We have worked hard to build partnerships with key sectors of the economy—aboriginal peoples, municipalities and others—to encourage growth, and we will continue to press the federal government for fairness. Our five-point economic plan is working. Since the McGuinty government took office in 2003, the Ontario economy has grown in a number of areas. In spite of challenges in the manufacturing and forestry sectors, we have half a million net new jobs, and real wages continue to rise. Unemployment is lower than it was in 2003, while the labour force has grown. We made these gains despite rising oil prices, a weak US dollar and a slowing US economy. The McGuinty government's five-point economic plan has helped prepare Ontario to weather the current economic uncertainty.

The world's reality has changed dramatically in the last few weeks, and so has Ontario's. The slowing US economy and global financial situation are causing significant uncertainty. On a daily basis, we're seeing our markets and economies changing. The five-point economic plan will continue to guide us while we respond to the rapidly changing world economy.

Our government will do everything it can to protect the gains made by Ontario while taking a balanced, comprehensive approach to future growth. In his fall economic statement, Minister Duncan outlined some of the challenges facing Ontario's economy. We know that certain sectors, some communities and too many families are struggling. The 2008 budget acknowledges and addresses these sectors, these communities and these families. On October 22 we introduced Bill 114, the Budget Measures and Interim Appropriation Act, 2008. If passed, this new legislation would help seniors, families and businesses weather these challenging economic times.

Let me talk about taking care of our families. Ontario families are concerned about their investments, their pensions, their mortgages and their savings. Some are experiencing job losses, particularly in the manufacturing and forestry sectors. Ontarians are concerned about how they will be able to afford care for elderly parents and relatives while balancing full-time jobs and taking care of their own children. To help families cope with these very real challenges, the McGuinty government is proposing to initiate a new property tax exemption for temporary

residential dwellings that are built on the same parcel of land as an existing house to accommodate a senior family member. These are known as granny flats. By being able to build a granny flat, elderly relatives can remain close to their families, while the associated tax exemption will put more money in the pockets of hard-working Ontarians.

Taking care of Ontario's families has been a priority for the McGuinty government for the last five years, and we continue to make it a priority through unprecedented investments in health care, education, infrastructure and skills training, which create jobs now and improves productivity in the longer term.

Many Ontario seniors are concerned that recent market turbulence will put their pensions and retirement savings at risk. Financial markets are volatile, as the last few weeks have demonstrated. Pension funds, RRSPs and retirement income vehicles have all been affected. Markets, however, have historically recovered and pension funds are long-term investments. It is important to remind ourselves that pension entitlements are usually paid out over many years and retirement savings come from a combination of pension income, accumulated savings and investment returns.

Ontario property and sales tax credits provide property and sales tax assistance to seniors with modest incomes. Since 2003, our government has made several improvements to these credits to ensure that they better reflect the circumstances facing our seniors.

We would like to take that one step further by proposing an amendment to the Income Tax Act which would increase the 2008 Ontario property and sales tax credit threshold for senior couples to \$24,300 from \$23,820 in 2007. This change will benefit senior couples who rely on the guaranteed minimum income from federal and provincial programs.

About 76,000 Ontarians reside in long-term-care homes. As part of Bill 114, we are also proposing an amendment to the Assessment Act that would implement our 2008 budget commitment to preserve the historic tax exemption for long-term-care homes established under the Charitable Institutions Act. This would maintain the quality of care provided to seniors residing in these homes and support increases in the long-term-care capacity.

Let me take some time to talk about the initiatives we have taken and continue to take to lower business costs. Our government knows that businesses want choice, less red tape and improved efficiency in the services they get from government. To this end, as I have said, we developed the five-point economic plan to encourage long-term sustainable economic development. Training and education enable people to get the highly skilled jobs that will improve Ontario's productivity. The plan has seen unprecedented investments made in post-secondary education, innovation and infrastructure.

Our five-point economic plan is working. We have taken steps to reduce the administrative burden on businesses. This summer, we launched ONT-TAXS, On-

tario's tax service to reduce the administrative burden on businesses. Our first step was establishing a single toll-free number for tax administration help and information.

This past June, we replaced 39 ministry telephone numbers with one toll-free number, and businesses will soon have 24/7 access to taxation information and services online, including account inquiry, tax filing, tax payment, and change of information. These new systems will make it easier for businesses to get the information they need when they need it.

Our government also introduced one common business number as Ontario has joined the federal government and other provinces in using the federal business number to securely identify a business and its associated tax program.

We have also cut costs and improved efficiency for Ontario's businesses by harmonizing federal and Ontario corporate income tax administration. This will save businesses up to \$190 million a year in administrative costs and corporate income tax savings. Streamlining the tax system through a single combined federal and Ontario corporate income tax return means one tax form, one tax collector and one set of income tax rules for 2009 and subsequent tax years. This means that corporate taxpayers in Ontario will see a 50% reduction in the number of notices of assessment and corporate tax audits now that the CRA, the Canada Revenue Agency, will be performing these functions on behalf of Ontario; a 20% reduction in the total number of papers of their tax return; a 28% reduction in the number of fields that need to be entered on their tax return; and a 50% reduction in filing requirements for objections as a result of the standardization of federal and provincial appeals procedures. This translates into a lot less paperwork, leaving business owners and managers more time to run their businesses.

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For several years now, we have been partnering with key sectors of the Ontario economy and other jurisdictions to encourage economic growth. We made it clear we were ready to work with Ontario businesses to partner with those that wanted to grow by investing in their workers and new technologies. Since then, through support from Ontario, the auto industry has announced nearly \$7.5 billion in new investments right here in Ontario.

To encourage an innovative economy, we need to attract and keep the best and brightest. Earlier this year, we launched the Next Generation of Jobs Fund, a \$1.15-billion strategy to help innovative companies keep pace with changes in the global economy and secure new knowledge-based jobs and investments in Ontario. We also appointed a new Minister of International Trade and Investment who will work exclusively on promoting Ontario to the world and attracting new investment and trade opportunities.

The McGuinty government is also very aware of the impact that taxes have on Ontario businesses, and we keep lowering business costs would help businesses succeed and create more jobs. That is why, since 2004, we have cut business taxes by more than \$1.5 billion. Fully

phased in, our tax cuts will save Ontario businesses nearly \$3 billion annually.

Small businesses are the economic backbone of Ontario's communities, accounting for approximately 40% of employment in the province. Retroactive to January 1, 2007, we have increased the small business deduction threshold by \$100,000, to \$500,000, up from \$400,000. This initiative will provide thousands of small businesses across the province with about \$100 million of tax relief over a four-year period. More than 20% of this tax relief will go to small businesses in the resource and manufacturing sectors. We are also paralleling the capital cost allowance measures announced in the 2007 and 2008 federal budgets that benefit manufacturing and support clean energy generation.

We have a competitive corporate tax system in Ontario. Our combined general and manufacturing corporate income tax rates are almost seven percentage points lower than those of our main trading partners, the American Great Lakes states. We have already taken measures to help protect existing jobs, stimulate investment in new jobs, and provide immediate cash flow to those industries most in need of working capital.

We have also legislated a plan to eliminate capital tax on July 1, 2010, 18 months earlier than scheduled in the 2004 budget. We are also cutting high business education tax rates by \$540 million over seven years. This is expected to benefit more than half a million businesses in 321 municipalities across this great province of ours.

All of those tax relief measures are intended to encourage job creation and economic growth, and they support the Ontario government's action plan for the economy.

In the 2008 budget, we announced \$750 million of tax reductions for business, primarily benefiting the manufacturing and resource sectors, over four years starting in 2007-08. We all know Ontario is a province rich in natural resources, but a weaker US dollar and a troubled global economy have put stress on Ontario's resource companies, which employ thousands of workers across the province. Bill 114 takes further action to reduce the pressure on our resource industries by extending the property tax exemption for minerals to include limestone, gravel and other mineral aggregates, so that all mineral substances will receive consistent property tax treatment. This is in addition to the \$1.1 billion of business tax relief over three years announced in the 2007 fall economic statement, which supports manufacturers and other sectors in the province challenged by current economic conditions.

I would like to take some time to talk about the innovation strategy here in Ontario. Innovation creates jobs. In addition to historic investments in attracting new high-technology jobs to our economy, we have provided tax incentives to commercialize Canadian ideas so that homegrown ideas turn into hometown jobs. The Ontario innovation tax credit is a 10% refundable tax credit available to small and medium-sized corporations that carry on scientific research and experimental develop-

ment in Ontario. Bill 114 proposes to increase the tax credit expenditure limit to \$3 million from \$2 million of qualifying expenditures. The McGuinty government also proposes to extend the taxable income phase-out range of between \$400,000 and \$600,000 under the credit to a new upper limit of \$700,000 of taxable income. This amendment to the tax credit would extend the credit to more small and medium-sized businesses and expand it to a greater amount of R&D expenditures. This proposed extension would be implemented by paralleling enhancements to the federal scientific research and experimental development tax credit proposed in the 2008 federal budget.

The McGuinty government is working to level the playing field for those who follow the rules and impose penalties for those who don't. Unpaid taxes, premiums and other fees mean less money for health care, education and other important services that help all Ontarians. In addition to our focus on service improvement to support voluntary compliance, the McGuinty government is also looking to strengthen enforcement and, in particular, to tackle the underground economy in Ontario.

One of the areas of the underground economy where we are very active is the enforcement of Ontario's tobacco tax legislation to help minimize contraband tobacco. Our government continues to work with our federal and provincial counterparts to explore new and innovative measures to address contraband tobacco. We continue to review opportunities in our own legislation to enhance our enforcement measures to encourage tobacco tax compliance. Bill 114 includes amendments that would strengthen the tobacco tax enforcement provisions, including implementing the 2008 budget announcement to regulate the purchase and use of cigarette-making machinery, adding more provisions that would allow the seizure of contraband tobacco products, and adding minimum penalties. The province will continue to consult with key stakeholders on additional mechanisms to improve compliance and administration. Enforcing tobacco tax laws also complements our smoke-free Ontario strategy.

In the 2008 budget, our government vowed to improve administrative effectiveness and enforcement, and maintain the integrity and equity of Ontario's tax and revenue collection system. We also pledged to enhance legislative clarity and regulatory flexibility to preserve policy intent. That is why we are proposing amendments to the Fuel Tax Act that clarify that the use of coloured fuel is prohibited for recreational vehicles, authorize the use of coloured fuels for railways to conform to the practice used in neighbouring jurisdictions, and provide authority for including fuel acquisition permits on the ministry's Internet listings.

As our government has stated before, we are willing to work with other jurisdictions in Canada toward the establishment of a common securities regulator.

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While a single regulator would provide the best opportunity for Canada to improve its competitiveness and

respond effectively to the ongoing turmoil in the global capital markets, none currently exists. This remains a priority for our government.

In the meantime, Bill 114 proposes to amend the Securities Act to facilitate interprovincial enforcement of securities laws. This amendment would permit the Ontario Securities Commission to impose sanctions where it determines this is in the public interest, based on a conviction, sanction or settlement for a securities law violation in another jurisdiction.

Let me take some time to talk about our partnership with the federal government and how we can work together to ensure that Ontario continues to prosper.

We continue to move aggressively to obtain fairness for Ontarians in Canada. If we were treated fairly by Ottawa, we could keep more of our hard-earned taxpayer dollars in Ontario. I should be careful. When I say "Ottawa," I mean the federal government, not my great city of Ottawa. We could move faster and further with our five-point economic plan to strengthen the economy. In particular, we could better support Ontarians who are losing their jobs. The federal government has to work with us to help manufacturers by supporting business investment and economic development right here in Ontario.

We believe it is vital that the federal government make changes to the employment insurance system to provide Ontarians with needed employment supports. The EI system is particularly ineffective in serving the needs of workers in the manufacturing sector, which is faced with a weaker US dollar, a slowdown in the US economy, high energy prices and the impact of globalization.

We have made tremendous progress, but there's much more to do. We will keep investing in innovation, in the skills and education of our workers, in infrastructure, in lowering business costs and in developing our partnerships.

The McGuinty government's 2008 budget undertakes initiatives for those sectors, communities and families facing external challenges. And if changing circumstances demand it, we will change our plan, to make it stronger. Our budget is about making sure people have jobs and Ontario's economy grows. It is about ensuring that all Ontarians have the opportunities and the skills to succeed so that together we can grow a stronger Ontario.

I now ask the honourable members for their support for Bill 114 so that we can move forward with our plan, invest in Ontarians, create jobs, and improve competitiveness for tomorrow.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's a pleasure to enter debate today. I do not envy the task the member from Ottawa Centre had today. It's unusual that the finance minister would forgo the opportunity to speak to an economic statement. Having said that, these are unusual times, and I can understand why the finance minister would not want to speak to this after he brought in a deficit of at least \$500 million.

Over the weekend, I had an opportunity to read an article written by Randall Denley in our great city's newspaper, the *Ottawa Citizen*. "Duncan would have you believe that the provincial deficit is the result of economic events of the last few weeks. That's simply untrue. Ontario's economy has been atrophying for two years, but the government continued to spend without an eye to the future," says Randall Denley. He goes on to say, about your five-point plan: "The five-point plan, in reality, consists only of old-fashioned infrastructure spending, minor business tax cuts, a skills retraining plan that has been a" flip "flop and a lot of talk. What Duncan and McGuinty have been doing isn't working, and yet they just keep doing it."

We in the Conservative Party have been challenging the Liberals for the past two years to take the economy seriously. We've outlined for them what I think are four solid next steps. One is to meet with the opposition leaders to talk about a pragmatic and practical solution to our economy, not a political one. We've told them and urged them to restrain their spending with our bureaucracy. We've asked them to lessen regulations, and we've asked them to reduce taxes. They've done none of the above. Instead, they've come out with their five-point plan which, as Mr. Denley points out, is all wrong.

It is a shame that the finance minister chose not to lead off this debate. Had he been proud of what he had done and accomplished last week, I'm sure—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I would like to thank the member for his submission. It was well thought out. Unfortunately, it doesn't deal with the issues. I'm really surprised that the member—and not just him but other members of this House from the government—keeps saying that they want to work with other levels of government; they want to work with the opposition. Well, that's not quite true. We have submitted bills that have all been shot down by the government. Every bill we've submitted to the committee level has gone down in flames. Every time we make suggestions, they don't listen. If we do have good suggestions and we bring them to committee level, they want to either steal the idea or not even deal with it. In fact, I brought a bill forward, Bill 6, which they didn't even give me the courtesy to read. So when they say these things, it sounds like they want to do it and it sounds like they want to work with us, but that's not the case. It's their way or the highway.

There are things to be done provincially, which we've stated: for instance, our 10% manufacturing tax credit, "Buy Ontario," all the things we've brought forward, but because it's not their idea, they don't want to deal with it. They want to come up with some kind of subdeal or something else under their wording to make it look like it's their idea.

When I came to this Parliament, and it hasn't been that long, I was told that maybe we could work together for the people of Ontario; maybe we would work as a team to better the lives of Ontarians. That's not the case. It's

very partisan, and any good ideas that fall short of the table don't even get dealt with. It's very unfortunate and very disillusioning to me.

Finally, they are constantly blaming the feds. They're constantly blaming the Conservative government. There are things that we can do here provincially. Yes, we could use some more money from Ottawa—there's no doubt about it and I won't deny that. But there are things we could do, and they are not being dealt with.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Thank you. Member for Mississauga—Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: I know in my communities of Lisgar, Meadowvale and Streetsville, people watch what's happening in the United States, and they look at the meltdown of other foreign banking systems. They have asked me, even up to some of the events I was at this weekend, "What is this going to mean to us here in our community? Is it going to mean, for example, that Credit Valley Hospital's phase 2 project is either going to be delayed or cancelled?" The answer is no. "Does it mean that our much-needed improvements on the GO system and our fixs-up at Meadowvale, Lisgar and Streetsville are going to be delayed or cancelled?" The answer is no. "Is it going to affect the phase-out of the hated GTA pooling?" The answer is no.

This is a bill that's responsible and that responds to the challenge of the times. One of the things that it does is to focus on innovation. In the private sector, successful companies make specific commitments to generate revenue from products and services they do not now offer. So too does Ontario. We can see in this particular bill the Ontario innovation tax credit, which is a refundable tax credit available to small and medium-sized corporations to reward them for doing things that they don't do now, for generating jobs that don't exist now and for being able to provide opportunity for people doing things that they aren't doing now.

This is the way to go. This is the way that progressive governments all through the world are going. And who are they copying? They're copying Ontario. We are leading on this.

Now, other parties would see us do something different. The Ontario republican party—or is that the opposition? I think it's the Ontario republican party—would see us give away nearly exactly the same \$5.5 billion that we found in a hidden deficit before the 2003 election. It doesn't make sense. We don't close hospitals and down-load recession costs onto the young, the old, the poor—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I want to make some comments regarding the member from Ottawa Centre's debate. He talked about Ottawa, and, quite frankly, I have to mention that I did a TV show and was asked on the TV show, "What do you think about Minister Flaherty making his comments?" I said, "What do you expect him to say? He is constantly being attacked by these individuals," as was mentioned again during the debate, that we have to blame somebody else. Well, there comes

a time to lead, and you have to lead by example and step up to the plate. If things aren't coming your way, you deal with what you have before you and you address that issue and move on. You don't blame somebody else. It's a game that parties of every stripe play, at all levels of government. Whether it's the municipalities blaming the province, which is blaming the feds, and vice versa—the whole vicious circle—the end result is that we have one taxpayer and we have to take care of that individual.

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The member spoke about better service for people losing their jobs. We have the second-time-around program, which deals with individuals losing their jobs. I think we should have somewhat more of a strategy to deal with individuals growing into new jobs. There's such a strong emphasis on certain aspects of society and developing that, where other areas, such as skilled trades—I know that there was a lack in a number of fields, that we could use some assistance in a number of areas. Some focus on that would certainly aid in that area as well.

The member spoke about being ineffective related to the economy. Well, I know that one of the ministers recently showed up in Thunder Bay and made a multi-million dollar announcement with a forestry company. We only have to look at what happened within that sector to see that. However, it should be known that that same forestry company spoke to me and said they had 10 times that amount to invest somewhere and they weren't coming to the province of Ontario—that exact same company. They were looking elsewhere. Because of the structure and everything that was happening within that sector, Ontario was not a place to invest.

We need to move forward in the best interests of all Ontarians, and working together is one of the best ways.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The member for Ottawa Centre for a response.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I want to extend my gratitude to the members from Nepean—Carleton, Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Mississauga—Streetsville and Oshawa for their insightful comments.

Every single member of this government is very proud of the investments we, this government, have made in our communities since 2003: investments in our health care sector, investments in our education, investments in our public services, investments in our infrastructure. These investments have made sure that Ontario today is a strong province, that our infrastructure—that our health care sector and our schools are good places for our citizens, our constituents, to be.

This government is not playing any blame game. This government is only seeking fairness for Ontarians. That's not blaming; that is saying that we should be able to keep our share in order for us to prosper and grow. That's not blaming anybody. We want to create a stronger Ontario so that Canada is even stronger. This country is built on the backs of its citizens, and we, as a nation, are stronger if every single part of this country is strong. That's why we're asking the federal government to invest in Ontario,

to make sure that Ontario is treated fairly in terms of its unemployed workers—that is the employment insurance—its share for the health care sector and infrastructure. That is in no way a blame game. By blaming others, we are abrogating our responsibility, and I don't think anybody in this House is elected to do so.

I urge all the members of this Legislature to bind together to ensure that in these rough economic times, in times when we all are scratching our heads and looking outside, asking, "What is going on globally?"—all our financial institutions are just crumbling away, things we took for granted. We need to come together. We need to ensure that we, as a collective, continue to grow Ontario stronger, and the federal government is as much responsible—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Could I ask for unanimous consent to defer the lead by our critic, the MPP for Niagara West—Glanbrook? He will be here a little later on. I'd like to speak in the meantime.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The member has asked for unanimous consent to stand down the lead. Agreed? Go ahead.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: It's a pleasure to stand today and speak to Bill 114, An Act respecting Budget measures, interim appropriations and other matters, to amend the Ottawa Congress Centre Act and to enact the Ontario Capital Growth Corporation Act, 2008.

I know this is going to be a very interesting debate as we work our way through it, because there's going to be a lot of discussion around deficits. I'd like to go back to the last government and to the situation that then-Premier Mike Harris found himself in at the beginning of 1995. As you know, there were close to five years of deficits accumulated by the government before that, the Bob Rae government, the guy who I think will probably try to be the leader of the federal Liberal Party. The reality is that those budgets, those numbers, totalled almost \$50 billion over those five years. They had a difficult economy; there's no question about that. Times were tough in those days, and they tried to spend their way out of it. That's a fact. That was their philosophy and those were their policies, and as a result \$50 billion is added on to the overall debt of the province.

I listened to the Premier of the day and he said, "Well, when the Conservatives were in power they had five years of deficit." That is true, but what he didn't mention—and he never does mention anything to try to explain why he said it—was that under the Common Sense Revolution and under Mr. Harris he put a plan forward that in four years, by the time 1999 rolled around, he would have slowly eliminated the deficit. That is what happened. It went down a few billion dollars a year. At the same time, and in spite of the fact that they like to say Premier Harris cut health care, the reality is he didn't. Health care spending went up every year, as it has with every government since 1983, I believe, or something

like that. It has been some time since we have not had a government that has increased health care funding.

We got to the point where we had a difficult year and a deficit had accumulated—I'm not sure of the exact amount of that deficit—in 2003. Again, only a few days after the current government, the only government—

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: It was \$5.6 billion.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: You can heckle me all you want because I'll heckle you back.

Okay, let's say it was \$5 billion. The reality is that never once have they ever mentioned anything to do with SARS, with the blackout, with West Nile virus, with mad cow disease. Those were all factors that hit this province in 2003. They have never explained one penny of that away. They never gave the government any credit whatsoever for that. They just said we were poor managers.

Now we've got a government that's going into deficit, and what's happening? After they have increased spending and increased taxes for the citizens of Ontario by \$29 billion a year in the last five years, a 41% increase in spending, now they're going to see a deficit. They inherited a good, strong economy. Yes, we were trying to keep taxes low. That was our philosophy. But the reality is, they've wasted this money away, and now, when we have difficult times ahead of us, there's nothing there for us. There's no money set aside like the billions of dollars they could have set aside to wait for a rainy day. They've had a good, strong economy. They've wasted it, with a blow to bureaucracy; we all know that. And the reality is, we have a Premier who stood in the House, who stood at a photo op under the Taxpayer Protection Act in 2003 during the election campaign and signed the Taxpayer Protection Act pledge that said, "I will not raise your taxes." That's what he said, and "I will not have deficits." That's what he said.

Now we're seeing another broken promise. That's what this government is all about. How many promises do you continue to break? One after another, year after year, week after week, and it goes on and on. Now we've got some tough times.

What do they do as a result of that? It's never their fault. It's always someone else's fault. Let's just say it's the price of gasoline, it's the world economy and, of course, the big one is Stephen Harper. Stephen Harper has only been the Prime Minister for the last 30 months. Where were these folks before that? Where were they before, when we had years and years of our party and the New Democratic Party complaining that the federal government under the Chrétien-Martin years was not coming through with the proper funding? They would never say anything against Martin or Chrétien. It was always, "You're not spending money wisely." They would never give any credit to the fact that we were asking for the same thing that they're asking about today. What they did is they just blamed our management of the economy. But now their number one mandate as a government is to try to blame Stephen Harper for everything.

Look at the money that the federal government has actually transferred, and it's not even being used. We'll

start out with the police officers. You got \$156 million on April 1. You signed on the dotted line. I've said that to Minister Bartolucci. They signed on the dotted line that they would accept the \$156 million. And what has he done since then? He has done nothing but harp and gripe about the fact that it's not the kind of agreement they wanted. So you say to yourself, if it's not the kind of agreement you wanted, and you are the minister, why did you sign on the deal? Why did you take the money? Why didn't you decline the money? That's what I would have done if I was the minister. I'd have said that it's not a good enough deal for Ontario, but they grabbed the money, they put the money in a bank account, and now they're saying that the deal's not good enough. And what have they done? They announced a measly 300 cops. They promised 1,000 police officers underneath the 2,500 officers program from the federal government. Ontario's only going to end up with 329, apparently. Or maybe that's a step, phase one, and they can announce the other ones later.

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I was at the OPPA association's banquet the other night at their annual general meeting and the minister—that's all he got up and did—just yelled and screamed at Stephen Harper and Rob Nicholson from the federal government for not providing enough money. But it was he who accepted the money; it was Dalton McGuinty that accepted the \$156 million from Ottawa. They accepted the terms and the conditions of the agreement, they took the money—as I said earlier, it's in the bank account—and now they're griping about it; it's not enough money.

The same thing applies to this make-work program—whatever the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities is supposed to be doing in his role, I don't really know over there. But there's \$355 million he has available, and on top of that there's another, I believe, over \$1 billion in retraining money that the federal government has sent these people and they have not used it yet; it's sitting in bank accounts. I guess they're prepared to not spend the money, and we heard today the questions coming to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. He's saying that there are thousands of people utilizing this. I don't think there is. The reality is that this money that was transferred under these make-work programs or this retraining program is really not having an impact at all.

I wanted to mention a couple of other things while I had the floor. We talked about the retraining money and new money for police officers. This is money that this government has from the federal government; they have not spent it. They're sitting back and just continuing to blast the federal government at every opportunity they get.

But I want to talk a little bit about one of the things the ministry loves to stand up and do: talk about how they've increased the number of inspectors in the WSIB. Well, we may have more inspectors, but what we don't have is consistency in how they inspect. I got a call last week from a manufacturer in Simcoe county, and I'm not

going to use the company's name because they will probably be retaliated against. But the reality is that this company manufactures cement products and has over 50 years in business. They have an outstanding record in Simcoe county. They have half-million dollar trucks on the road. They take their cement products into the United States. They have other plants across Ontario, and they've always complied with every rule. The WSIB or Ministry of Labour inspectors are in there on a continual basis inspecting the premises, and as recently as two years ago they had the whole building what they call regarded for the workers' safety.

Just recently, two weeks ago this Thursday night, a Ministry of Labour inspector went in, shut the plant down and said that it wasn't satisfactory to him. They pulled out all the records from the other inspectors, and the inspector said to them, "That was them; this is me." There is no consistency. So whatever some inspector interprets, he walks into the job and puts all these people—they had to send the shifts home and they had to work all weekend to satisfy one inspector, keeping in mind this plant had been upgraded just recently. And the owners, of course, were really unhappy with this, and they said to me, "Do you want us in Ontario? Do you want us as a member of your community creating jobs and working here?" because, you know, it doesn't sound like we do. I'm hearing that there is a blitz across the province right now, attacking these companies—I don't know whether it is all about health and safety or it's all about a bunch of inspectors being on ego trips—but the reality of the matter is that they're not inspecting on a consistent basis. That is my key message here: It's simply not consistent because they should all be inspecting the same kinds of products and the same kinds of working conditions and they should charge companies or credit companies on the positive or negative things they're doing on a consistent basis, and we're not seeing that.

So I wanted to put that on the record, because I don't know how many people here in this room are getting a lot of complaints about WSIB, but we're hearing it almost every hour now. What people are saying is that this government, Dalton McGuinty's government, is not business friendly. That's what's driving manufacturing jobs away. They don't feel welcome in the province of Ontario. I've heard that over and over again.

As recently as a couple of weeks ago, I was talking to one of the upper administrators at a plant up in Penetanguishene, and he told me that every three months he has to go to the United States and convince the owners of the company why they should keep the plants in Ontario. He's doing it because he wants to keep these jobs in Penetanguishene. There are over 500 of them. They are very important to the economy of our community and to the province of Ontario. Almost every other jurisdiction they deal with in the United States is having incentive programs to relocate those jobs out of Ontario, and over and over again, he has to find reasons why not to relocate those jobs out of our province. That, I find, is a very,

very difficult position to be in and also why I think we've got to quit playing these games that we're playing and move forward and really, as my colleague says, start working together.

I think the federal government probably could use a new arrangement with the province of Ontario. But it has to be—

Interjection.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Let's be fair about it. We can support some of that, but when we look back and see how the current government completely ignored the fact that there could have been any kind of discrepancy in the funding coming from the federal governments when there was a Liberal government in Ottawa for 13 years, that's a problem, because for 13 years we know that happened. I can remember sitting in this House, and I think it was Mr. Arnott who made a resolution, and Premier Harris adopted it, asking the federal government to increase the funding for health care from 13 cents to 19 cents on every dollar. The names of all three party leaders were on the piece of paper: Michael Harris, Dalton McGuinty and Howard Hampton. Howard Hampton signed the sheet. Mike Harris signed the sheet. McGuinty refused to sign it. Now what does he do? He can't answer a question where he doesn't blame the federal government. That's what happens. In almost every question, in his answer to this House—and even in the comments coming from the parliamentary assistant today, half of them were blasting the federal government. They weren't trying to work with the federal government.

They should take a message. The Conservative Party of Canada holds the most seats in Ontario right now. That should have sent you a message. In my riding, they won by thousands and thousands of votes—18,000 votes in Barrie. I think it was 20,000 votes they won by in Peter Van Loan's riding. There's a movement of conservatism in this province. They should start to listen to Mr. Harper and not cut him up every time he turns around. They had a choice. They could have gone toward the green shift and Mr. Dion. Of course, you've seen how quickly they kicked Mr. Dion out of his seat. They could have gone that way, which would have meant higher taxes. The citizens of Canada decided not to go that route. They stuck with Mr. Harper. They believe he is a much better fiscal manager and that my former colleague Jim Flaherty is a much better Minister of Finance. They've just won—it is a minority government, but just barely a minority government. So people should start to listen to their concerns and work with them. I understand already that Premier Danny Williams has agreed to work in co-operation. I haven't heard anything from Mr. McGuinty, but quite frankly, I think it's a mistake for them not to go in that direction.

We have a lot of other things I'd like to speak about today. Why do we have a couple of these ministries? There's one ministry called the Ministry of Small Business and Entrepreneurship—what is it called?

Mr. Norm Miller: Small business and consumer services.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Small business and consumer services. I'm telling you, that guy never answers a question. He never answers a question on small business. I don't know if he supports small business or not. Today he answered some questions, and every time he answered a question on a particular company, he found another company that might have been doing not too bad that he had visited, but he didn't answer the question on the company that was going broke. For example—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): May I remind the member to keep the debate to the issue on the floor, which is Bill 114.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Thank you, Madam Chair. What I'm trying to say here is that this bill is all about good business practices. These guys are in a deficit now, and it could go as high as \$5 billion or \$6 billion like that, and they'll spend the rest of their term having huge deficits.

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One of the things I believe very strongly is that they don't believe in growing small businesses. The parliamentary assistant talked about contraband cigarettes. You know what? We've almost completely wiped out the small convenience store operators. They have all these power walls in now. But you can go into all these First Nations smoke shops and have as many cigarettes as you want—I think they account for something like 30% of the cigarettes on the market now—and no one is doing anything about it. If it is partly a federal issue, maybe they could start working with the federal government to stop that, because I thought we were worried about health care here. That's why we passed the Smoke-Free Ontario Act, because we were worried about kids getting their hands on these cigarettes. They can just go out to the First Nations and buy them, and there are smoke shops everywhere in the First Nations areas.

I'm glad to see we have our Minister of Agriculture here today. I appreciated her comments last week in the estimates committee. But you know what? The reality is that the agriculture community is having a very, very difficult time. I've mentioned a number of times in this House about travelling to Quebec this summer and seeing the difference in Quebec's farmers and Ontario's farmers.

But the worst thing about it is the young farmers. There are hardly any young farmers going into farming. They see other opportunities. We just do not see them. That is a concern that we have. Any farmer in any of the agricultural societies, organizations or associations across our province will tell you that's one of their biggest fears: The young farmers are not going into the family farm anymore. It's a real concern, and there's nothing to create that incentive for them to do so.

As we move forward, there are a number of other issues I'd like to speak to today, but I'm going to make sure my colleagues have an opportunity to speak as well on it. But I go back to the fact that we have a bill here that is sort of an excuse for creating a deficit. The deficit is just a beginning. I think it's much more serious than

what they've let on. There are a lot of organizations now that have been used to getting a lot of money, but suddenly they won't get that money anymore, as they do cuts. When we were in power, it was "slash and cut." Now they're just saying it's a needed cut. That's what they keep saying they're talking about.

We have to face reality here. We are into some difficult times, but this is no time for this province to start running deficit budgets. I think if you quit having these parties at the Windsor casino for \$2 million or \$3 million and you start acting responsibly with the taxpayers' money, not spending money on these fancy brochures that are put out by the Ministry of Tourism and organizations like that, those are areas you can start to cut right now. You don't need to do that. You don't need to have that kind of literature. In fact, I would even suggest it's probably against the very law that you passed. I could bring some of them forward to show you what they look like. One was put forward this year by the Ministry of Tourism.

As we move forward, I for one will not be supporting this bill. I think this is a government that has had a lot of opportunity to prove itself, and now we should be having huge surpluses with the kinds of increases they've had and not having deficits. We're at a time period in this province where we need to be creating excitement so people will want to continue to invest here. What we've done is, we've driven this province into probably the poorest economic condition of any province in our country, and that is unacceptable. It shows you the lack of interest and basically what I call the hatred of the small business person in this community. We've seen 220,000, 230,000 manufacturing jobs leave here. You wonder how many others are following them out the door when business leaders see a government that's prepared to run deficits.

I thank you for this opportunity, Madam Speaker, to speak to Bill 114 and look forward to further comments after.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: I rise to comment on the member from Simcoe North and what he had to say. I want to say at the outset that I think that he is correct in not supporting this particular bill. He is correct in not supporting the bill, because the bill will only add to the mistakes that I believe this government is making. But I also have to rise to state that I find that his solutions are a little lacking as well, because I do not concur with the rationale that he has given for attacking the bill and for attacking this government. He is talking about deficits. I know that the government of Canada will currently be looking at the possibility of running a deficit and that people throughout the economic community who are highest placed in our banks and lending institutions are cautioning the government that it needs to get away from the strident view about deficits.

I also have to comment that I do not think his solutions in terms of cuts—he mentioned some of the cuts he

wanted to make in terms of government brochures and bureaucracy and the like—would be shared by the majority of Ontarians. We have a civil service in this province of which we should be justifiably proud. They do an amazing job. We have the lowest civil-servant-to-citizen ratio in the entire country, and I do not want to cut them further.

I have seen in the past what the solutions he has advocated have done in terms of Walkerton. I have seen what they have done in terms of a department where we have fisheries officers and others who cannot go out and maintain our environment. I have seen environment officers hamstrung in their work for this province. The answer is not further cuts. He is right to oppose the bill, but he is wrong in his solutions. I'm hoping, in the one-hour leadoff I have, to talk about some of the things this government should be doing.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I am happy to have the opportunity to respond to the member from Simcoe North. I listened very carefully to his remarks, and there were a couple of things I did want to make some comment about. As the minister with responsibility for agriculture in Ontario, I certainly recognize that we have a role to play to support our industry players, and we have done that. We will continue to do that. In the last five years, there has been \$1.1 billion spending in risk-management programs and ad hoc programs to support farmers. I believe that farmers in Ontario are doing an excellent job.

I was a little disappointed when I heard the comment that the member from Simcoe North was in Quebec and suggested that he noticed a real difference in the kind of farms they have there. They do farm a little bit differently there, but I would say that the farms we have in Ontario are as strong, as vibrant and as well managed as anything—he's shaking his head. I can't believe that we have a member in this Legislature who is comparing our farmers to Quebec's and suggesting that ours are not right at the very top. They absolutely are. Our farmers are implementing new technologies. In fact, I have the Minister of Agriculture from Quebec wanting to come to Ontario to meet me, to visit our farms to see what we're doing here.

I would say to the people of Ontario, with respect to the path our government is looking to pursue with this bill, if passed, that I'm satisfied that the minister is prepared to present a deficit instead of cutting programs in my ministry that support farmers and the good work they do at a time when they need it the most.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to rise to comment on the member for Simcoe North. As always, he brought forward excellent points that focus on small business and his community. I was pleased to hear him talk so much about the concerns he is raising with the deficit and what that is going to lead to down the road.

I think we have to remember that since October 2003, the McGuinty Liberals have had more money—higher spending, higher taxes—than any other government; 40% more revenue coming in. What have they done? Have they paid down the debt? No, they haven't paid down the debt. They just did the easy thing, which was shovel it all back out again. They've increased the public sector; they've increased their program spending by 50%.

There are no heavy decisions being made by the McGuinty Liberals. There's no governing happening. We need a government that's actually going to make some tough decisions and decide which programs need to stay and which programs need to be phased out. I don't see those heavy decisions, those challenging government decisions, being made by the McGuinty Liberals. It's incredibly unfortunate, because when you don't deal with the debt, it climbs, and since the Libs have been in power, total debt in Ontario continues to climb. We're now faced with—every Ontario resident, every man, woman, child in Ontario—a \$13,000 deficit because the McGuinty Liberals won't make tough decisions and won't actually come up with solutions to decrease our debt. Their solution is, let's have a deficit again.

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The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to respond to the honourable member from Simcoe North.

I'm sure the honourable member was listening to my speech. I spent the majority of time in my speech talking about the kind of business tax cuts we've been bringing in the province of Ontario, and the kind of reduction in red tape we've been bringing by harmonizing our corporate tax system, by increasing the capital cost allowance for our small businesses. That's the kind of investment, those are the kinds of changes this government is making to ensure that small and mid-sized businesses can get that advantage and don't spend their time filling out forms and paying higher taxes but actually spend more time running their businesses and generating wealth—what they're supposed to do. That's what our budget is working toward, is meant to do.

When the members from opposite say that somehow this government has wasted money by making investments in the public sector, what they fail to relate to us or give us is advice as to where we should be cutting. They talk about cutting in the public sector. Should we be firing nurses? Should we be getting rid of water inspectors or meat inspectors? They fail to give us advice as to where they would like to see the cuts.

We've seen that movie before. We have done that. Since 2003, this government has been working toward fixing the broken system which was led by the Conservative government of the past. What we've been doing is making sure that our hospitals are actually there to provide care; that we have more nurses; that we have more teachers in our schools, to ensure that our kids get the education they need. That's where we have made the

investment, and Ontarians really appreciate it, because that's the mandate they have given us: to invest in our hospitals, to invest in our schools, to make sure that the public has been given the kind of fundamental services they pay their taxes for.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The member from Simcoe North for a response.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'd like to thank the member for Beaches—East York, the Minister of Agriculture, the member from Dufferin—Caledon and the member for Ottawa Centre for their comments on my comments.

I'd like to begin by saying that I wasn't trying to talk about making massive cuts; I was trying to say, "Spend the money efficiently." When the Ontario Lottery and Gaming commission is spending \$2.7 million on a party, I don't think that's a good use of taxpayers' money. I don't think giving a million dollars to a cricket club, when they asked for \$100,000, is a good use of taxpayers' money.

I've seen the brochure put out by the Ministry of Tourism. It was one of those glossy things, costing about \$15 to print. And you know what? I don't think we needed that at a time when tourism operators were failing drastically this year. That's the kind of thing. If you want me to go on and on, I will. The reality is, you can save money by not wasting money.

As far as the Minister of Agriculture is concerned, why I brought up the Quebec model is quite simple. I travelled through Quebec this summer, and I'm seeing new houses being built on farms, I'm seeing additions being put on barns, I'm seeing new trucks and new tractors in their fields, and I'm not seeing that in Ontario. I'm seeing dairy farm operations closing down—and those are our profitable ones. There are only two hog operations, Madam Minister, left in the county of Simcoe. There used to be 75 or 80, minimum, at any given time. That's what's happening to agriculture. There are no young people going into the business. They want out of there. They want out of it, because they're not happy with this government.

I've said before, and I'll say it again, I think this government has a hatred for entrepreneurs and business operators and farmers. We see it day in and day out. People aren't—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Excuse me. Can I just ask the member not to ascribe motives to other members of the House. It's against the standing orders. Thank you.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Okay. I believe this government is anti-business all the way. There's no incentive for them to create jobs here. People are not happy in the manufacturing industry in the province of Ontario under this government.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: Pursuant to the House leaders' meeting earlier this afternoon, and based on the findings of the Speaker earlier today, I'm seeking unanimous consent to move, without notice, a replacement motion for the official opposition's scheduled opposition day of Tuesday, October 28.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The member for Leeds—Grenville has asked for unanimous consent to put a replacement motion forward in replacement of the motion from today. Is it agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I move that, whereas the alarming number of murders—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): To the member for Leeds—Grenville, the motion just needs to be filed by 5 o'clock today, I believe, and that will take care of the matter. Thank you.

Further debate?

Mr. Michael Prue: It's a pleasure to rise and talk about this bill, a bill about which I'm sure people watching on television will wonder, "What is this all about?" Every year, we come and talk about the interim appropriations bill, and everybody wonders what that is all about, and the budget measures and everything that's contained within it.

Just for a little edification here, this is a bill that contains so many provisions—I believe that in total there are 23 different acts and bills that are amended by it. It's how the government intends to spend money. It's an opportunity for them to add changes to bills in order to bring them more in line with government thinking. But most telling, it is a bill that allows the government the authority to spend money. It allows them not only to spend money from the fall economic statement, but it allows them quite clearly to spend money in ways that we cannot even imagine for the next two years.

Just for greater clarification, I'd like to quote what I think is the important section of the bill, which is hidden way down in schedule J. It reads as follows: "The schedule enacts the Interim Appropriation for 2009-2010 Act, 2008 which authorizes expenditures for the fiscal year ending on March 31, 2010 up to specified maximum amounts. The expenditures authorized under the act are to be applied in accordance with the votes and items set out in the estimates and supplementary estimates for the fiscal year ending on March 31, 2010 that are tabled in the assembly."

So what the government is asking for this Legislature to do today in the debate of this bill is to authorize their entire finances, not just from the fall economic statement, but in fact through the budget in 2009, through the fall statement which I guess we can expect next year in 2009, sometime around this time of the year, and right up to and including—or up to but not including—the budget in the year 2010.

You can understand why the opposition is a little reluctant at this time to grant this interim appropriation, and you can understand our reluctance based on what has happened economically and based on what we perceive is happening in the economy in general in this province and around the world. You would have to understand and pardon me if I don't agree to vote for this. You would have to pardon me and understand when I would understand why every single opposition member would be reluctant. And you would have to question, I think, and people out there in the audience watching this would

have to question, why backbench Liberals are so willing to stand on their feet and talk in glowing terms about this and give what will amount to *carte blanche* for this government to spend whatever they want—whatever, literally, they want, and whatever they put before this House—for not only the year 2008, but all of 2009 and for the period ending March 31, 2010.

To do so, one would have to be satisfied with the way the government is currently handling the economy and the state of affairs of this province. I would have to state categorically at the outset that I have not been satisfied. I have not been satisfied when the finance minister stood in his place in this Legislature last year at the time of the budget and said that we were going to have a surplus of some \$3 or \$4 billion. I'm not satisfied when that same finance minister only a month or two ago stood in his place in this Legislature and announced that there was still going to be a surplus and that times were humming along quite nicely, thank you very much. And I am not satisfied when the minister stood up last week and told us that we were going to be running a deficit.

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I'm not totally opposed to deficits, and I will speak to that in a little bit, because I do believe that the deficit is small. But what is troubling to me and I think to Ontarians is that the biggest deficit so far has been that of the credibility of the finance minister, who can go from some billions of dollars that we are going to have in reserve to, "The economy is fine and just trust me," to "Hello; we are now in a deficit situation"—the same finance minister, I might also state, who, when scrummed outside in the press gallery and on television over the last few days, has not wanted to venture even one iota of an opinion on what will happen to the budget of this province in the next year, never mind what he may or may not be saying in March 2009 when the new budget comes forward.

The reality I understand as well, because, in voting against this budget measure and other budget measures, I and all of the opposition members and all of my colleagues in the NDP, whenever we ask a tough question, are going to be berated by government members, particularly the Minister of Finance and the Premier, that we didn't vote for their budget bill. That's what happens almost every day. I watched it again in amazement today. A simple question was asked about tax policy as it related to municipalities and property taxes. Of course, we were waiting, and of course, out came the answer that the opposition had not voted for last year's budget bill, which contained a very small provision that some people who are on fixed incomes—not all people, but some people—might be eligible for a \$250 tax gift if their assessment went up.

It's very difficult to vote for a budget which contains \$90 billion and to say what portions you agree with and what portions you don't. But I am sure that when we vote against this bill, which contains 26 acts, no matter what time we stand up and ask a simple question, whether it be under the Tobacco Tax Act or any of the others that are

contained in here, a member of the government will stand up and say, "You opposed this piece of legislation."

The reality is, we don't have a choice. The government is always and singularly unwilling to separate out those things which the opposition will agree to and will always include those things which we don't. I heard the current Minister of Transportation describe it once, five or six years ago, when I was still fairly new in this House. He called it the poison pill; that every government, including his own, included a poison pill provision that the opposition could not agree with so that, from that point on, when the opposition voted no, they could bring up all the positive aspects of the bill any time a question was asked, any time they did not have an answer, to point out how the opposition had voted against it.

In voting against this bill, because I am not willing to give the government carte blanche for the next two years, I realize full well that what is going to happen is, they are going to stand up from time to time and remind me that I would not give them that carte blanche. But they're not going to phrase it like that; they're going to phrase it in terms of the Tobacco Tax Act or any of the others that are contained within the body of this bill, and they're going to contain it almost every single time that a budget or any budgetary matter is brought forward.

If we were to vote for this bill, we would be voting for and we would be supporting a government that has made absolutely failing efforts in many key aspects of the economy and the infrastructure of this province. We would be supporting a government that has allowed 230,000 manufacturing jobs to flee this province in the last five years under their mandate. We would be supporting a government that has allowed the economy to decline at a very rapid rate. We would be supporting a government where we have gone quite clearly and unequivocally from a budget surplus a few months ago to a budget deficit today. We would be supporting a government that sets up a retraining program—and a much-vaunted one—where they patted each other on the back continuously for days and weeks, talking about how they were going to do long-term retraining, only to find out that only about 1,000 Ontarians have availed themselves of the plan and its dismal failure. We would be supporting a government that refuses to talk about poverty, that just held its fall financial statement, where the finance minister and the Premier on their feet did not even mouth the word "poverty" once; didn't even talk about one of the most pressing issues facing unemployed and underemployed Ontarians today.

We would be supporting a government that agrees with and continues to contract out services in hospitals and other places, looking at two-tier options, looking at more expensive options in terms of hospitals and schools.

We would be supporting a government that is not supporting our municipalities, a government that has time after time after time delayed the announcement that they promised in terms of municipalities, in terms of the cities and towns of the province of Ontario, which were supposed to be getting some kind of relief in terms of the

download and were supposed to have some kind of a plan on the table.

Most recently, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing stood in his place and said that it's taking more time than he thought and promised an answer by the end of this week. Quite frankly, if the answer was coming by the end of this week, I would have expected it by now, and I expect that some time around Thursday or so he won't announce that in the House. He will quietly let it slip by until the first media scrum, whence he will announce that it's somewhere on the horizon before the end of the year—the same horizon, of course, that the government now invents for its much-vaunted poverty plan.

The government will also say—and I'm ready for the barbs—that we did not support their five-point plan. But again, how can you support a five-point plan that has failed so abysmally? How can you support a five-point plan that has failed in economic good times when we are now in economic bad times? That is what is being asked here today, and I will not be supporting this Budget Measures and Interim Appropriation Act for those reasons.

I'd like to just go on and talk about what the government has done and why I do not give them the carte blanche set out in schedule J to literally spend any amounts of money they wish between now and March 31 of the year 2010.

This government has, over the past five years, stood on the sidelines while 230,000 manufacturing workers lost good jobs. They have stood on the sidelines while 40,000 direct and indirect forestry jobs have been lost in Ontario, where sawmills, pulp mills and paper mills literally across the whole length and breadth of northern Ontario and some of the ancillary jobs in southern Ontario have been completely gone. I hope some day we may get them back, but I despair in terms of the workers who have lost their jobs in those far northern communities, and I despair in terms of the manufacturing jobs, which seem every day to be fleeing our province for other climes.

Today in this Legislature, we did not hear the answer from a minister when asked why this government chose to buy Mexican-made sweaters for the RCMP that could and should have been made in Ontario. That's the kind of question that Ontarians need to ask: whether this government is, in fact, looking at the positive economic potential of this province and is doing everything necessary to protect the workers and the people who live here.

The economic storm clouds are here. The Minister of Finance, despite years of saying the economy was fundamentally strong, is finally admitting that the workers have lost their jobs in manufacturing and the resource heartlands. With every new statistic that is reported comes more bad news about job prospects in Ontario, and it's not just, unfortunately, the manufacturing and forestry sectors, but it's now starting to hit just about everyone.

The Liberals' answer to this has been woefully and totally inadequate. A couple of weeks ago, Premier Mc-

Guinty presented a resolution in this House—and I don't believe it has passed yet. I don't believe so. We haven't voted on it yet. I don't think so. He presented a resolution arguing that his so-called five-point plan was sufficient to guide Ontario through an economic downturn.

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: No. I just wanted to make sure I hadn't missed it, because it was such a monumental and momentous debate. He suggested that the same five-point plan that has failed so much in the past in protecting the 230,000 manufacturing jobs and the resource sector is now adequate to support what is left here in Ontario.

1510

Ontarians, I believe, are looking for a real economic plan. They're looking for something. They're looking for a government that will be activist, a government that will reach out and do something different, a government that will acknowledge that what it has done in the past is not sufficient given the length and the gravity of the spiral, not only in this province, but in Canada and around the world in global markets. We are looking for a government that will do something to sustain and create good jobs and help families where workers are facing layoffs, provide better protections and fairer benefits.

Ontarians were expecting to see something real in poverty—and I'm glad to see that the poverty minister is here to hear what I have to say; I was across in the Macdonald Block an hour or so ago to hear what she had to say, and I hope she will now listen to what I have to say on this topic—that is, looking for real action on poverty. It is not just a time when fall economic statements are put forward on where monies are to be spent, to give platitudes and to say that we're studying and that we are waiting for December, but I think it would have been appropriate for the finance minister and the Premier to stand in their places and quite literally say how the fall economic statement could have accelerated the poverty plan, how there could have been a down payment to that plan, and even if the plan was not ready there are certain things that could have been done and should have been done immediately to help those who are starting to suffer the economic downturn that is invariably upon this province. Nothing was said, and nothing was done. Instead, after repeated question upon question, there was nothing said or done about poverty on that day. In fact, there has been nothing said or done about it to this very day.

I commend the minister for speaking to the 300 or 400 people who were at the Macdonald Block, but I think in the end what was short, and certainly what the woman who sat next to me said—there wasn't much in that speech. It was a nice speech, and she congratulated the participants for having been party to it. She promised to take their message back to the cabinet. But there was no commitment—and perhaps she doesn't have the authority to make the commitment—to actually do something, to actually find the monies, the mechanisms, the bureaucracy and everything else that is going to give some meat and substance to the proposal. There was no commitment

to do that. That's what we in this opposition, and particularly in the NDP, have been looking for so that low-income families, where most of the devastation will occur by the economic downturn, would have a better chance to survive it.

Ontarians wanted to see continued investments at the same time in public services that matter the most in terms of hospitals, education and municipal infrastructure. The fall economic statement was that opportunity for a real plan, but it failed to reverse the course, and it failed to deliver any kind of cogent plan or sustain jobs. As I said before, and as I've said today, the word "poverty" was not mentioned once, and the economic statement signalled to the public that the services they count on will be the first, perhaps, on the chopping block if the government decides that that's where it has to go.

This government has failed 230,000 families in good times. Now they are asking, by Bill 114, for us to trust them for the next year and a half; for the same government, the same process, the same five-point plan and the same platitudes to be given credibility and to be acted upon when the government is in bad times.

New Democrats do not believe that that's the way we should go. New Democrats believe that we should be putting forward a real plan, a plan that would assist manufacturing and resource sectors and would prevent the massive job losses that have devastated many communities across the province.

As I said, Madam Speaker, there have been a lot of jobs lost in this province in the last little while. Just some recent examples: 430 jobs, or 80% of the workforce, at DDM Plastics in Tillsonburg were chopped; in Niagara in the last month, 800 jobs were lost at John Deere in Welland; and the temporary layoff of another 480 at AbitibiBowater. Lost since June 2004 are 100,000 manufacturing jobs in Toronto, 25,000 in your city of Hamilton and almost half of Thunder Bay's manufacturing jobs. Forest industry jobs, of course, have been lost as well. I should not have to tell the government opposite and its members how important manufacturing and resource jobs are, because once they are lost, they are never likely to come back, and we will become a society and a country and a province where we used to provide our own resources; we used to provide our own manufacturing goods. We will, with the loss of these jobs, increasingly have to go and find them elsewhere. Whether it is the sweaters manufactured in Mexico, whether it is automobile parts that come from Korea, whether it is computers that come from many countries around the world, or finances that come from the United States, or commodities that come from Europe, or agriculture—and who knows where it comes from these days?—these are things that Ontarians used to produce with pride, and they are things that are being lost, unfortunately, with a government that does not take a proactive and pro-Ontario policy.

The Dalton McGuinty government has pretended that the current job crisis is limited only to manufacturing and forestry, but we know that there is a lot more going on out there.

Just a few things:

The second-quarter economic accounts released by the Minister of Finance last month showed that the output from the manufacturing sector continues to decline. Exports declined 2.5%, particularly in the automotive, industrial goods and materials sectors. With the United States in freefall, this is expected to get worse. We know that the economy in the United States is getting worse, and it is getting worse at a faster rate than it is getting worse here. We saw what was happening in the automotive sector, and I remember the statement made by Mr. Ken Lewenza, the new president of the Canadian Autoworkers, where he talked about the inability of Canadian plants to produce the goods that they once did. It was not because they were not cost-effective, because, in fact, they were cost-effective. It was not because Canadians and Ontarians were not buying the products, because, in fact, Canadian and Ontario markets had gone up 1% or 2% and people were buying the cars that were built here. But the fact is that they were seeing an 18% decline in Chrysler, and I believe it was a 13%, if my memory is good, in Ford, and to a lesser extent in General Motors in terms of decline, because where the cars were not being bought was in the United States. Because that country's economy was tanking, our economy was being dragged down with it and the workers who were producing those goods were not in a position to produce them anymore.

But the real news is that when you combine reports from the first two quarters of this year, it becomes clear that the rest of the economy is no longer picking up the slack and we are ending up with declining output in many sectors of the broader economy. The retail sector, financial services and construction are in trouble. Statistics Canada released a report on retail trade last week that showed a decline in retail sales in Canada by 0.3%. Although that may sound small, this eventually will lead to big losses of jobs. We know that the time when people start to buy most of their goods and services is in the three- or four-month period leading up to Christmas. This is the biggest sales time of all, and in the month of September we saw a decline. This is not normal, it is not natural, it is not something that happens a lot, but it is a decline.

We are seeing in our chief trading partner, the United States, a huge reduction in retail sales. Usually this is the time, leading up to Thanksgiving, when people go out and start buying in huge amounts for the Christmas and Thanksgiving holidays—it's the biggest shopping day of the year in the United States—and the retailers there are telling us that they expect much slower sales. As go they, so shall we go.

The US credit crunch is creating higher mortgage costs in Canada, and when combined with higher unemployment and lower incomes, declines in residential construction are on the horizon. As the 2009 Emerging Trends in Real Estate Report states, "Less volatile Canadian real estate markets cannot avoid shockwaves emanating from the big elephant in the room next door."

That's bad news for our construction sector, which employs over 400,000 workers.

Stock market declines and the collapse of international banking institutions are likely to lead to layoffs or less hiring in the financial services sector. As I speak, there are layoffs taking place on Wall Street; there are layoffs being contemplated on Bay Street and in many financial sectors around the world. Hence, governments across the world—in Britain, in Iceland, in the United States and even here in Canada—are running to the banking sectors trying to give money to stave off what is happening. But as they run to those banking sectors, there are other sectors that are being ignored. Job losses in previously untouched sectors—retail, construction and now even financial services—may very well be on the immediate horizon.

1520

I don't want to be a doomsayer, and I know much of what I'm saying—but I want to say how this is the enormity of what is going to confront the finance minister. This is the enormity of why he will not answer questions of what he anticipates being in next year's budget or whether he's going to be in a budget deficit position. It is an enormous proposition before him, and he will not answer it. But I think we need to talk about that and why we ought not to be giving carte blanche for this government, in this bill, to spend monies up until March 31, 2010. The TD Economics report a couple of weeks ago forecast negative employment growth in 2009. Their report reads: "Real GDP growth in Ontario is expected to barely advance in 2008 and 2009, placing it last amongst its peers. The lagging nature of employment in reflecting economic conditions leaves significant downside risks to the job market, especially since the manufacturing sector is expected to continue to bleed jobs and this will disproportionately hit the province."

Faced with this, growing numbers of manufacturing and resource sector workers, gloomy statistics and report after report forecasting further job losses, the McGuinty government has finally recognized that there is trouble on the horizon. But their answer is a five-point plan. That five-point plan didn't work in good times. I don't know how they expect it's going to work in bad times. We think something more needs to be done, and we have been proposing some real things that we think can be done, because we believe that governments need to be upfront. They need to be there when you're trying to do something for the economy, when the private sector and private sector monies are failing to do what needs to be done, or where they're suffering through the greed or incapacity or being incapable of running their own businesses. There needs to be a group like a government that can step in. We believe that in our party; we believe it with all our hearts.

Some people in the past may have thought, "Leave everything to the private sector." But when you look today, even their gurus—Greenspan, called before the committee, had to admit that leaving it totally up to the private sector had been a huge mistake, that something he

had talked about for years and years, of leaving it up to the private sector, ought not to have happened. It ought not to have taken place in the United States, and it has been to everyone's detriment since then. So we believe that something needs to be done and that the governments have a role.

The other night I was on *The Agenda*—I don't know if it's called *The Agenda* anymore—with Steve Paikin, and I was there with Diane Francis, a well-known columnist and author. She's with the *National Post*. There was a fellow there from CIBC, and Mr. Hudak was there, Mr. Sorbara and I. We were all there debating what was happening in the economy. What surprised me was that Diane Francis came four-square out in talking about the need for governments to intervene; that governments had a role, especially in times of financial turmoil, to be the steadying influence, to be the safe captain at the rudder, to be able to do something to stimulate the economy. I'd never heard such words from her before. I had never heard someone with her passion for the marketplace coming in and acknowledging what the circumstances might be where governments had a role. But she certainly upbraided the member from—it used to be Erie-Lincoln, now it's something—Glanbrook—Mr. Hudak.

Interjection: Niagara West—Glanbrook.

Mr. Michael Prue: Okay. She certainly upbraided him for saying that the government should not be intervening at this time, and she quite eloquently, in just a few words, stated why that was necessary. But we don't believe that the McGuinty government is any more activist in this file than Mr. Hudak was saying that we should be. We think that the government should not be looking at simply staying the course but that they should be doing something actively to promote industry and jobs in the province of Ontario.

We have put some real proposals on the table and I have not yet heard what has happened to them, because I know when we had a debate on the opposition day motion last week put forward by Mr. Runciman, it was a motion that called for an all-party select committee to travel the province to hear ways of stimulating and working with others on the economy—that it should be made up of individuals from the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party and the New Democratic Party, and that we should be able to come together and form some kind of consensus on where we lead this province. I stood up in support of that motion not only because I thought it was the right thing to do, but I believe that members from all sides of this House have an obligation, in times of potential turmoil, to give their best efforts. If those best efforts involve members of my party, members of the opposition, members of the government, and if it takes all of us to work together, then I think that that is where we should go.

Perhaps it was in my naive time or my time as a municipal councillor and mayor, where—I'm not sure I was naive; maybe "naive" is not the right word—we worked together. We came up with a consensus solution that always seemed to work. We involved everyone around

the table, whether it be in East York where there were nine of us or the city of Toronto megacity, where there were 57 of us. We sat around that table, we came up with a consensus, we voted on the consensus and we used all the best ideas and the best heads and the best knowledge and strengths that everyone had to come to a consensus, particularly on difficult issues. We saw the leadership of the mayor. We saw the leadership of some of the people that the mayor had chosen, whether it was in East York or, again, of the 57 members in Toronto. And I know that that is literally true of all the 480 municipalities across this province. It is true in forms of municipal government, where they don't have the separation at two sword-lengths across this aisle. They don't have that separation and they are compelled to work together, and they do, in fact, work together. That is something that I was hoping, and I still hope against hope, that this government will acknowledge and will try to do.

When the Premier stood up on his own motion, he said he wanted to hear all of our advice. He wanted to hear all of the best ideas that we have, but that motion is still ongoing. That has been weeks now, weeks in the making, and we're still arguing it. It has still not come to resolution and it has not come to a vote. When the Conservatives put forward their motion basically asking that all of these ideas be thrown into a select committee, I welcomed it. But I have to tell you, my hopes were dashed. The hopes were not great but my hopes that such a resolution might be passed were dashed when literally every single member of the government stood up and spoke against it and then voted against it.

What were the ideas we were trying to put forward? We were trying to put forward, I think, sane and sensible ideas for turning this economy around. Now I know it's going to be difficult in one province in one medium-sized country to turn around the entire global economic tsunami; it's going to be difficult. But if we sit here and do nothing, then we are failing the people of Ontario. I think, within the limits that we have available to us, there are things that we need to discuss, things that, when I put them forward in this Legislature, all too often are not listened to, all too often are not acted upon, all too often end in the abyss, and the government goes on with its own five-point plan and listens to nothing else.

1530

We are putting forward ideas—and I put them forward again today—that we think will help enormously in this time of job loss. The first one is a Buy Ontario policy that would ensure that streetcars, subways, buses, be continued to be made right here in Ontario, resulting in the protection of thousands of good-paying jobs. I don't limit myself just to that; that's what our motion has said in the past. I also believe that everything that is produced or can be produced in this province, if the value is close to or near the lowest cost that is available, should be taken from here.

I certainly heard the question today about the RCMP sweaters, and I have to tell you how saddened I am that the government of the province of Ontario has not put

forward the plan that the sweaters be made here in Canada. I'm not familiar with the manufacturing plant in Guelph, but I am very familiar with the manufacturing plant called Dorothea Knitting Mills, which is within the borders of the old borough of East York. It's run by a wonderful man by the name of Beryl Borsook. Beryl Borsook literally built that factory that is there today at the time of the last depression in Ontario. I'm talking about the years 1990 to 1995. I was the mayor of East York, and he came to me with a plan to build that factory. It was his belief that Canadians could compete in making garments with anyone in the world. He was prepared to spend the money. He bought machinery from abroad in many cases, because the knitting machines had to come from there because they were not manufactured in Canada. But he believed that once those knitting machines were installed, everything else that flowed from that, from the materials used—the yarns, the wools—could be made in Canada and they could be produced by Canadians working in those knitting mills. He was and continues to be very successful.

But where he is not successful is selling to Canada, to Canadians and to governments. He finds that all too often, when he puts in a proposal, his costs are more than those offshore. He has a difficult time competing with workers and manufacturers in China and he has a difficult time competing with workers and manufacturers in Mexico. It's not because the quality of his product is any worse—in fact, it's better—and it's not because he is not doing a huge service to the environment because everything is being produced locally with Canadian-made goods. When you buy a sweater made in his factory in the former borough of East York, the costs to transport it into downtown Toronto are negligible in the cost per item. He's not harming the economy; he's doing a great service. But he has difficulties because governments in this country will not do what governments in literally every other country around the world do, and that is to buy directly from the people who live here.

He explained to me on one occasion about the Sarbanes-Oxley Act in the United States, which was unknown to me. It was a difficult act to fathom until he explained it in a nutshell, which was that if you are going to sell anything to a US military establishment, then the goods must be made in the United States. He is the only manufacturer of berets in North America. He makes berets as part of what he does, and American soldiers wear berets. He supplied them for years with berets until the Sarbanes-Oxley Act came along, but then he couldn't do it anymore because the berets couldn't be manufactured in Canada; they had to come from the United States, even though there was nobody in the United States who manufactured them, so he had to. What he did was, he set up a small company and he went down there. In order to continue to sell the berets, he had to move part of his operation from Canada and move the beret-making machines down to the United States in order to supply the US military.

I only raise this because this is what has happened to Canadian industry. Even a man who can compete so

brilliantly, as he has done, even a factory that employs workers who are all Canadians, who make those goods for sale, cannot compete because there are protectionist attitudes elsewhere. If the United States can do that for its military, I don't know why Canada and Ontario can't do that for the RCMP. I do not understand why the sweaters have to be made in Mexico. Are they cheaper? Yes. Can a man like Mr. Borsook compete with the wages that are paid in Mexico? No, he cannot, and rightly so. We expect him to pay minimum wage—although he pays above that, here in Toronto—but we expect that the workers will all make \$8.75 or more an hour. Can that compete with manufacturing where it's \$1 an hour? No, it cannot. Is that why he's losing business? Yes, it is.

Should the government, though, be buying those sweaters, or should they be buying them when they're made here? I think the answer is very clear: We should be buying those that are made here. I know that many municipalities, including the one of which I was the mayor, and later the one of which I was a megacity councillor, had a policy that did the same thing: We bought things made in Ontario. We had a policy in East York that when we tendered, if the locally produced supplier could supply it at a cost of no more than 10% higher than the lowest bidder, we would buy it from them. We knew that it might cost a little more money, but we also knew that we were buying the goods and services first of all from East York companies and then Toronto companies and then Ontario companies and then Canadian companies that would keep manufacturing jobs in this country. I think it's a good policy and I would like the government to adopt such a policy. I think it's a policy that Canadians and Ontarians would adopt and agree with. But so far, to date, no one is hearing that on the government side of the House.

We think there should be a five-year guarantee of an industrial hydro rate so that some of the industries can get past the difficulties that they're having here in Ontario with a hydro rate that is expanding, that is continuing to go up. I see this primarily not so much from the Americans or from Mexico or from offshore, but in terms of Ontario being competitive with its neighbours, both in Manitoba and in Quebec.

I know that the government will stand up from time to time and tell me that there are a lot more flowing rivers and hydroelectric capacity in northern Manitoba and Quebec and going into James Bay, and that is true. But we have capacity of different kinds. We have capacity, whether it's from solar or windmill; from coal generation, which is being phased out; from nuclear, which is expensive—but we have capacity, and a lot of that electricity can be given over to an industrial hydro rate. Certainly, countries like Germany have relied upon that for years, where industrial hydro rates are given and where jobs are protected. I think we could protect a lot of jobs if we looked at that.

I'm looking at a jobs protection commissioner. We've floated this idea, and the government keeps standing up and saying it didn't work in British Columbia. It was there for a long time, until a new government took over

and, surprise amongst surprise, did things that all new governments do: They got rid of old ideas from the previous government. This was one that did not make the chopping block when the new Liberal government was elected with the fall of the NDP government there a number of years ago. But while it was there, there is a very arguable case that jobs were protected. The commissioner did go into a number of factories that were scheduled to close down, found out what the problem was—whether it was that the electricity rates were too high, whether it was that the contract signed in a unionized place was too high, whether there were some transportation difficulties, whatever it was—and then went back and reported to the government what would be necessary to keep the factory operating. It worked, and sometimes the government could help and sometimes they couldn't.

But even if we can save one factory or two factories or 10 factories from closing down in Ontario, we think it's an idea whose time has come. We believe in tougher plant closure legislation that would ensure that everything is done to prevent a profitable plant or mill from closing, and in addition an enhanced mandated severance. It is a shame when factories close down and you know—and the factories reveal in their books—that they're still making a profit. Perhaps not as much profit as they'd make in Mexico; perhaps not as much profit as the parent company in the United States; perhaps not as much profit as they want, to diversify into another area—but they're still making a profit.

We think that there should be some tougher plant closure legislation. I hearken back—and I've spoken about this in the past in the Legislature—to one of my first jobs, at a place called Dunlop's, which combined with Pirelli, an Italian company, and saw fit to close down the plant even though it was profitable, throwing 600 or 700 people out of work. It's a thing we should not accept. It is a thing which we absolutely should not accept, provided that it is profitable.

We should look at the expansion of severance eligibility. We should look at pensions and wage protection. Last but not least, we should look at a refundable manufacturing and resource investment tax credit that would really provide an incentive to keep jobs going. We need to do that because if we can do that in combination with the other things, we can keep manufacturing plants going into the future. After all, that is what is important. Rather than doing a holus-bolus, across-the-board tax cut, which my friends in the Conservatives often want to talk about or that the Minister of Finance often lauds among his accomplishments, we believe that it should be targeted to the sectors that are most vulnerable. Those sectors, at the present time, are the manufacturing sectors and the forestry sector. If we're going to give tax cuts, it has to be tied in with the retention of jobs. We think that this is the vehicle to do it. We're asking that you consider this idea, but so far, no one has.

1540

In terms of poverty—again, I'm getting back to my poverty theme because today seemed to be a day for

poverty—I was heartened by the 300 or 400 people who were in the room. I'm just using an estimate. I'm not like the police, who can estimate crowds, but it seemed to me that there were 300 or 400 people in that room.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I guess there were at least six Liberals there.

Mr. Michael Prue: I know the minister was there because I watched her speak.

There were people in that room who have spent a lot of time talking about the 25 in five program, getting poverty down 25% in five years. We think that the economic statement that was released in the fall and Bill 114 should have done something to give us an indication that we're going there.

I know that some of the poverty activists, in their fifth point, were talking about a down payment in the budget, but I don't believe we can wait that long, nor do I believe we need to wait that long. There are certain things that this government could do now and that they could have done in this financial statement that would have indicated where they are going to proceed and certainly where we, as a government, need to spend money.

Something that wouldn't cost very much money, if anything at all, to the government, would be to increase the minimum wage. When we ask this question, the government says, "Well, we've increased it," and, yes, they have. It was frozen for so many years, it was so abysmally and ridiculously low, that the government finally was forced to agree that it was low, and they increased it. Nobody is going to say the increase is bad. The increase is better than nothing. Almost every person I know who works for that minimum wage is happier that it is higher today than it was last year. Of course, they're not going to say no. But is it enough? Does this government honestly believe that the minimum wage is enough for people who are forced to work on it? You have to remember who the people are. They are predominantly women, and many, if not most, of those women are recent immigrants. They are people coming here who are trying to land a first job, who are trying to make ends meet, who are trying to feed their family, who are trying to get ahead in a new society. They are often-times young people and students who are trying to save to go to university or to college or to higher education and are being forced to work for minimum wage. We don't think it's enough. It would cost the government almost nothing if you increased the minimum wage from its present status to \$10.25. You've said you're going to do that by the year 2010, but we think that it can be done today, we think it should be done today. If that was done, that would be one of the single greatest actions you could take, that costs the government nothing, in order to help end poverty. Certainly, if someone earned \$10.25 an hour and worked a 40-hour week, they would make the equivalent of about \$21,000 a year. The poverty rate in Ontario, according to the low-income cut-off figures, is about \$19,000 a year for a single person, so if a single person working 40 hours a week earned \$10.25 an hour, they would be out of poverty. That is not a radical

concept, and I think the government could adopt that without costing the treasury any money.

Another thing I want to talk about that might cost the treasury a little bit—but so help me, I believe with all my soul, and I hope the members opposite do too—is not clawing back the monies that people on ODSP make when they go out and find a job. I particularly think about the developmentally disabled people I know. There is a wonderful group called Lemon and Allspice, part of a group called Common Ground. They hire young men and women, mostly in their 20s and 30s, who are developmentally delayed, and help them to work in kitchens producing coffee and baked goods, which they in turn go out and sell. But as Carolyn Lemon explained to me one day—it was very sad—these young people who do everything in their power to try to get ahead and work and do wonderful things are all on ODSP. They are all developmentally delayed. They come and get this job, and then the government claws some or most of it back. It seems to me that what is happening is a shame.

I don't believe that being born developmentally delayed or with the kinds of inherent problems one is born with should be tantamount to living in poverty for your entire life. I'm going to ask this question in estimates tomorrow, because I'm going to have my chance: How much money does the government claw back today from people who are on ODSP or are developmentally disabled? How much money are you clawing back from them, and what would it cost the government to end that? What would it cost you to end it so that at the end of the day with a combination of the \$12,000 a year, which is the maximum they can get on ODSP, and allowing them to earn another \$8,000 or \$9,000 a year, they would be above the poverty level? For the first time, being developmentally delayed would not be a life sentence of poverty. I ask, if a government is committed to do that, why not? Why not take that action? How much will it cost? It's a suggestion I'd like to make.

I'd like to make the suggestion about building affordable homes. I know that we asked the question, and I know that the government continues to talk about the 6,000 affordable homes, some of which have been built, some of which are being built, some of which are planned to be built and some of which are still a gleam in a developer's eye; that's all of the 6,000. I wonder—we have an economic statement before us—how much it would cost the government to move this up rapidly. We have the \$100 million that was given by the federal government, not all of which has been spent. We have a huge, desperate and crying need in this province for people to have affordable housing.

I went to see one of my constituents, an elderly lady who asked me to come to her home to talk about her application for assisted housing. She is living in assisted housing now, but she simply wanted to move from one location to another that was perhaps more culturally sensitive. She is an Ismaili woman and wanted to be close to the Jamatkhana because she is devout and likes to go there to pray from time to time. Also, the place

where she is living is not in close proximity to grocery stores. The closest one was shut down a number of years ago, and there is a grocery store next door to the place where she wants to go. There is the Jamatkhana, there is her doctor, and she simply wants to move.

I told her I would do my very best to inquire into her application to move from one location to the other, which was now seven years in the making. When we inquired into it, sadly I was told that the wait is from 12 to 15 years. The reason it's from 12 to 15 years is because virtually no assisted housing has been built in our area for a long, long time. That's for somebody who is already in there. That's not for somebody new. That was not going to displace anyone.

She was simply going to leave one place, which was going to be freed up, to go to another place. But the waiting list in that location was from 12 to 15 years long. If it is from 12 to 15 years for a senior citizen to find an appropriate place to live, think of how long it is for families who have to wait. I would think that if there is to be any money spent—and this may be the lone and sole thing I talk about here that costs money—this is where it should be spent. I am asking the government, quite frankly, to consider this.

I care very deeply and passionately about people and about the poor. As I have said in this place and to Minister Matthews one time in a heated discussion, I'm from Regent Park. I care passionately about poor people and what we can do to help them. I care particularly passionately that governments can have a role to play, and it need not cost governments a lot of money, whether it's ending the clawback of the national child benefit, which I know some people are talking about—it's not done yet. It's not going to take place until 2011. It could be done faster. I will salute you in 2011, but I would rather salute you now. I would rather say in 2008 that it has been done and that we've let people keep the money for three years rather than wait for three additional years. Whether it's helping the disabled, whether it's helping communities or building housing, this is where the emphasis should be.

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As I said, there was no discussion of that in the fall economic statement, and I believe with all my heart that there should have been. This is where the government needs to go. It's certainly what the activists had to say today: that they cannot wait and they should not wait. This government needs to find the courage—and I hope the minister still has her courage button, because they gave it to her—to find those monies and to find the political courage and the will, if there are not those monies available, to find some other way to do it.

I talked earlier about deficits. I know that to my friends in the Conservative Party the word "deficit" is an anathema. I don't say that I want to go there, and I would go there only reluctantly, but as I did state the other night on the Steve Paikin show, if you are smart about a deficit, as long as you keep the GDP-to-deficit ratio low, then it is not something one needs to fear. In Ontario, we have a

very low GDP-to-deficit ratio. It is around 17.5%, which is absolutely enormously low. It hasn't been this low in a generation or two generations. It could move up to 20% without damaging the economy. I would be reluctant to go beyond that, and I don't want people to think this is just a high-spending person. But we could do that in the short term. In the longer term, though, we are going to have to look at sources of revenue. We are going to have to look at how we do that, to help the poor.

I have a couple of minutes left. I just want to talk about municipalities as we close. Municipalities are in for a very rough ride. In this present time of economic downturn, municipalities have very few sources of funds from which to get their monies. They rely, to a large extent, on property taxes. Property taxes are regressive. We have seen with the bills that have just gone out how certain people are being whacked. I gave the example today in question period of two women in Richmond Hill who have seen their properties re-valued by \$200,000 and \$300,000. So the properties that they are sitting on—their retirement home, the place where one of them has lived for 40 years, is now worth a lot more than what they purchased it for. As a result of the increases, they are going to see huge increases in their taxes. The government's answer is to simply give a \$250 tax credit, but only to those who qualify—there's a whole bunch of provisos; they can't be behind in their taxes. Although I don't understand that, because people who are behind in their taxes probably need the help more than those who are not behind in their taxes. That can be looked at. But municipalities have only this source. We need and the government needs—before October 31, and then definitely; I am loath to give the minister even one more day to go there—to come to that accord. We need to know when the downloading is going to be reversed. This has been discussed with the municipalities now for a year. It has been extended twice. I'm afraid it is going to be extended again. The government needs, in this economic statement and definitely in the next budget, to start looking very seriously at uploading the download, making sure that the municipalities are solvent and making sure that there are other ways they can find monies. Certainly the property tax is regressive, and certainly people who study property taxes around the world will give us one very serious lesson: They will tell you point-blank to our faces here in Ontario that the property taxes in Ontario are the highest in the entire world. No other jurisdiction in Europe—

Mr. Mike Colle: That's not true.

Mr. Michael Prue: It is true. I invite member Colle to actually study the thing. We pay the highest taxes in all of Canada because of the download, and we pay the highest taxes in the world because no one else relies upon it to the same extent. We need to find ways of making sure that the province pays for those programs that are provincially mandated and to leave the municipalities, which have only one source of revenue, to those things for which they are responsible. I ask that the government seriously look at that, and that they study it before too long and come forward with a program.

In the end, this government is going to have to find the money; it's going to have to do things that are necessary. I have outlined what some of those are—jobs, poverty, municipalities—and I'm simply asking them to get on with it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Il me fait plaisir de me joindre à la discussion sur le projet de loi 114 parce que c'est très important pour moi et pour mon gouvernement de présenter un budget équilibré. Je pense qu'on l'a démontré depuis qu'on a été élu en 2003. On a toujours présenté—pour trois ans, en fait—un budget équilibré et c'est très important pour nous.

Mais depuis qu'on a présenté notre budget en mars 2008, la situation financière mondiale a changé. Le ralentissement de l'économie américaine a causé des problèmes ici en Ontario et au Canada, et je pense qu'un gouvernement doit revoir ces situations-là et s'ajuster aux situations économiques. On avait le choix de faire ce que le gouvernement avant nous avait fait: c'est-à-dire couper les prestations d'aide sociale de 22 %. On avait le choix de mettre à pied des infirmières et des professeurs; on avait le choix de fermer des hôpitaux; on avait le choix de mettre à pied des fonctionnaires comme les inspecteurs pour la viande et pour l'eau.

On avait beaucoup de choix, mais on a décidé de modifier notre budget, d'accepter un budget déficitaire et d'augmenter la dette, mais tout cela en ayant la situation des Ontariens à cœur. J'appuie que pour cette année, vu la situation financière qui est tellement incertaine—même les grands économistes ne peuvent pas prévoir ce qui va se passer demain, alors c'est difficile pour un gouvernement, et on veut s'assurer que les Ontariens continueront à bénéficier des services qu'ils ont maintenant, tout en étant prudents dans nos dépenses.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Merci. Questions and comments?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I appreciate the opportunity to make a few brief comments regarding the statements made by the member from Beaches-East York on the budget bill. He raised a number of points, but I would specifically like to comment on the fact that the Ontario budget, or the economic statement, indicated that we are going to be running into a deficit of at least \$500 million this year. I think he is quite right in saying that normally deficit financing is anathema to Conservatives. However, we haven't faced anything like the current economic climate and it is something that—who knows what conditions are going to be in future years?—may or may not dictate a need to go into a deficit for at least a short period of time.

The problem with the deficit that is being contemplated by the McGuinty government is the fact that we're contemplating a deficit for this year. It is hard to believe that that could have happened after five years of record surpluses.

We've heard a lot from the Minister of Finance about what a prudent and responsible government would have

done. Well, a prudent and responsible government, to me, during that time period would have set aside funds and used them to pay down the debt so that in the event hard times come there would be a cushion there, an ability to have some money available so that we wouldn't have to go into a deficit.

This is important because, of course, it means that we are paying more and more in interest payments because this government has managed to rack up in its unprecedented spending spree an additional \$30 billion of debt since it came to power. That means an extra \$6,500 per family in Ontario. So that's during the good years.

The concern with the deficit that is being contemplated here is if that's what happens in the good years, what's going to happen in the next few years as things get tougher and tougher? The concern is that what is meant as a temporary deficit is going to turn into a structural deficit that we are going to be dealing with for years to come.

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The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Reza Moridi: It's my pleasure to rise in this House and talk about Bill 114. This bill is a reflection of the current economic reality of the world which has been imposed on us from sources outside of our boundary, mainly in the United States, where the economic situation is sluggish and the banking system, as we all know, has collapsed. This affected not only us in Ontario or Canada; it affected almost every country around the world.

Speakers who spoke earlier talked about the deficit of this budget. The reality is that the current economic outlook is projecting 0.1% economic growth. In the meantime, there is a \$500-million deficit projected in this budget review, but when you compare this figure of \$500 million to our budget of almost \$97 billion, this constitutes something around 0.5%, which is not very significant. It's actually very minimum.

When you look at the budget provisions, you will see that all programs which were indicated in the original budget for 2008-09 will continue to be funded. We'll continue to fund our schools. We'll continue to invest in our hospitals. We'll continue to invest in our universities and colleges. The only thing which this budget actually proposes is, there will be some slow investments in programs which we haven't started yet. Other than that, the remaining projects will continue.

As we know, one of the items of our budget is the almost \$3-billion tax cut for industries and businesses where they really need tax cuts. We are not going to cut taxes for every industry—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to comment on the speech from the member from Beaches–East York on Bill 114, the Budget Measures and Interim Appropriation Act, 2008.

The member was talking about the much-vaunted retraining program. Back in the spring when they were

doing the spring budget, there was a huge focus on training. He pointed out that, despite the fact that there were 230,000 manufacturing jobs that have been lost in the province, this program was only going to address less than 10%, at 20,000. The actual participation rate in the Second Career program is some 1,000 people, so it has been a huge, huge failure, and that was correctly pointed out by the member from Beaches–East York.

We, on this side of Legislature, the Progressive Conservative Party, have been asking that the government change their apprenticeship ratio policy. They could make a very simple change and it wouldn't cost them anything to be like all the rest of the provinces in this country, where, instead of there being a three-to-one apprenticeship ratio where you need three journeymen for one electrician, as an example, we match what the rest of the country does: one journeyman for one apprentice. That provides all kinds of opportunities for young people or those switching careers to have training opportunities.

This is a budget bill. The McGuinty government is a tax-and-spend government. They went in 2003 from \$68 billion in spending to now the huge sum of \$96 billion. They've increased spending 50%. The only government to increase almost that much was the David Peterson Liberal government. They did that in good years, so when bad times hit, the province of Ontario was very vulnerable. We're doing the same thing now. You've put us in a vulnerable situation. You had \$5 billion extra money last year. You spent every dime of it—every dime. It's unbelievable.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The member from Beaches–East York with a response.

Mr. Michael Prue: A couple of things. To the Minister of Community and Social Services, the member from Whitby–Oshawa, the member from Richmond Hill and the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka: I thank you very much for your comments.

The Minister of Community and Social Services talked about the downturn of the world economy. She said something that I think was prescient and correct, and that is that it's very difficult for economists today to determine in which place the economy is going. I don't disagree with her, and I think that is very true. But it is also the reason why I am reluctant to give the government cart blanche to spend all of the money that it is requesting between now and March 31, 2010. I started out with that, and I am in full agreement. That is what is being asked for in this bill: that the government be allowed to spend everything that it puts forward in front of this House and to have the monies to do so until that time.

Without knowing what is happening with the international economy, without knowing how Ontario's place is in it, without knowing that there are some programs and priorities that this government will come forward with to protect jobs and help the poor, I am reluctant to grant that authority.

To the other members—the member from Whitby–Oshawa talked about structural deficits, and I thank her

for that because I don't think there's any way that my comments should be misconstrued about building in structural deficits. I think that, in the short term, if we wanted to increase the deficit by a very small amount consistent with the GDP-to-debt ratio up to no more than 20, we would have play for about an extra billion dollars, and that may be necessary, given the circumstances. But in the long term, we need to pay as we go, and I believe that all parties of all stripes have learned that lesson from the past. I certainly have, and would advocate that.

Having said that, I thank the members for what they had to say, and I'm looking forward to hearing what other debate might come forward on this important topic.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Leal: Indeed, it's a pleasure for me to have an opportunity to spend some time this afternoon on Bill 114, the budget bill. Every day in the House, we hear about job losses, and there's no question that any time that a job is lost, it has a tremendous impact on one's immediate family and indeed beyond one's family on the community at large. We know the ripple effect and we certainly understand that that has extreme repercussions when a job is lost.

But it's interesting: There are some real success stories going on in the province of Ontario. This morning, I had the opportunity to visit Flying Colours Corp., which is headquartered at Peterborough airport in my riding. They've been in business for 25 years, and they have a very unique business: They refurbish corporate jets internationally. This is a company—and I know that I'm not allowed to use props, but here are two very interesting brochures that are put out by Flying Colours Corp. This is a company that's locally owned in Peterborough. John Gillespie is the owner and chief executive officer, and between John and his lovely daughter Kate Gillespie, whom my wife taught in elementary school a number of years ago, they gave me a tour of what is a rapidly expanding business in the Peterborough area.

Currently, they have about 300 employees, all very highly skilled employees. What's relevant to this debate is that they've utilized the skills-to-jobs program. In fact, they've hired, of late, 14 people who went through the skills-to-jobs program with Fleming College here in Peterborough. I'll put in a plug for my good friend Tony Tilly, the president. They took these individuals, whose jobs had been lost in the Peterborough area, and put them through this program very successfully, and now they're working for Flying Colours in the technical side of that operation. They're refurbishing jets for Raytheon, Falcon, Bombardier, Cessna and Gulfstream—the only company in Canada that's really in this market area, which is why they're having international success.

Over the last little while, we've heard some rather unfortunate comments about the Minister of International Trade going throughout the world to drum up business for the province of Ontario. When I visited this Peterborough company this morning, sitting on their tarmac was a jet that they've just refurbished for a customer in

India, and a second jet that was sitting on their tarmac for a customer in China. What John Gillespie said to me was that we need the government of Ontario and indeed the government of Canada—to have the Prime Minister and the Premier's cabinet ministers to be in jurisdictions like India and China to drum up business.

I worked for a small business in Peterborough, the Coyle Packaging Group, prior to my election in 2003, and one of the last things you do during challenging economic times is to go out and lay off your sales staff. You need people, each and every day, to be out promoting what Ontario has to offer. The Premier has left for China to drum up business in China. I just gave you two good examples of a company in Peterborough that's going to be looking at expanding its base in China and India and utilizing young men and women who have gone through Fleming College, through the skills-to-training program, to get jobs at a very successful company.

The Minister for International Trade recently visited Dubai. I learned this morning, during my tour of Flying Colours, that one of the largest aviation shows in the world—everybody thinks it's in Paris—is in Dubai. Companies from around the world go to Dubai to put on display the recent technology that they have to offer in the executive jet field. It attracts people from all around the world to go to Dubai. The other one, of course, that Ontario is present at is in the United States, in Orlando, Florida, in terms of executive jets.

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The other company that's doing extremely well on the manufacturing side—and I alluded to it before—is GE in Peterborough, which is now on its largest recruitment drive internationally since the mid-1970s. Of course, they're in the field. They build custom motors that are used offshore. Again, their customer base: China, India, and Europe—real opportunities to build that base. Again, how we enhance those opportunities is with the Premier, members of the executive council—indeed, the government of Canada—working with our embassies and consulates abroad to drum up business right here in Ontario.

Indeed, there's no question there are challenges. We know that the auto sector is going through a real transformation. But I think we have to be cautious that we don't see all of Ontario's manufacturing sector just through the eyes of the Big Three. We all recognize that they're going through a pretty profound transformation at this time.

Indeed, of course, the other bright spot for GE products in Peterborough—GE Peterborough is the head of their nuclear products division. Their business has expanded tremendously over the last number of years. They were partners for AECL in two China projects. I should mention that they were on time, on budget, in terms of those two rather large projects in China, and they're going through a tremendous expansion right now.

There's a lot of good news out there, and we've got to build on those success stories.

Just recently, I had the opportunity to read the Canadian edition of Time magazine, and they talk about

global business prospects over the next number of years. It's interesting. They surveyed 130 places in the world to rate global competitiveness, and in 2007, Canada ranked 13th, and in 2008, we have moved up to number 10.

One of the things I think we need to do as a government is to set our sights and say, "How can we get Ontario and Canada perhaps in the top five when it comes to global competitiveness?" And one of the ways we do that—and we can do that through the Ministry of Research and Innovation—is by putting those dollars into concepts that are currently on the drawing board and getting those concepts into the marketplace. This article goes on to say that in order to survive in the future, homegrown businesses are going to have to become global leaders.

It's interesting. For this article, they surveyed 14 countries, and they looked at the near-term potential for them to become global leaders. It says here: "China is home to the greatest number of global challengers, with 41; followed by India, with 20; Brazil, with 13; and then Mexico, Russia and Turkey." It says that together, these countries that I just mentioned represent about 17.3% of the world's total economic output, or gross domestic product, in 2006.

The challenge for Ontario and Canada is to foster those economic policies that will allow to us grow innovation in the province of Ontario so that ultimately these Ontario and Canadian companies become world leaders and dominate the global marketplace in identified markets.

One of the great successes is the BlackBerry—Research in Motion—developed by Peterborough native Jim Balsillie. In fact, I was at Jim's old high school on Friday night to attend their graduation. In one of the comments I made to the graduation class, I said to them that they're at the forefront of what they're going to see in terms of the green revolution. I said that in 20 years' time, when they go by the local car dealer, they'll see all those vehicles and trucks powered by battery, hydrogen or biofuels. That's where this economy is going, and that's why government has to be involved: to foster those initiatives that will allow us to really prosper in the new and changing economy that former President Bill Clinton has said will be worth at least \$1 trillion to the North American economy over the next number of years. These are the kinds of things we have been fostering, as a government, and the kinds of policies we want in place to nurture those opportunities to move them forward.

I want to talk about poverty for a moment. Poverty is something that has always been very close to my heart. During the 18 years that I had the privilege of serving as a city councillor in Peterborough, I was the chair of social services twice for six years. At that time, I had the opportunity to work closely with the agencies in the city of Peterborough and indeed on an individual basis to do what I could, in municipal government, to assist individuals who were really having some very difficult challenges.

Somebody asked why poverty wasn't mentioned in the finance minister's economic statement a week or so ago.

Indeed we are still on target. The Minister of Children and Youth Services will release a comprehensive policy for poverty reduction. We indicated publicly, through our consultations, that it would be released in mid-December. That's the course we're on, and when the paper gets released I'm looking forward to showing Ontario the comprehensive policy we want to put in place to deal with a really serious problem that I know all of us in this House want to do something about.

I heard my good friend from Beaches—East York talk about poverty; I know he has a great passion for this topic. But you've got to remember that the NDP government from 1990-95 froze ODSP rates in Ontario in 1993. Most people who take a step back and look at the spiral of poverty in Ontario go back to that date as the start of the spiral going downward. Coupled with the 21% cutback in ODSP and OW rates, it certainly led us to the position we're in today. Those are the facts. They froze them in 1993; I think everybody knows that. You can try to rewrite history if you want, but the facts are the facts.

We've introduced the Ontario child benefit program, which the late June Callwood said was the most progressive initiative introduced in the province of Ontario in the last 40 years. It's too bad that June is no longer with us, but certainly she was one of the most progressive and adamant voices to force governments to address the great concern about poverty. Those are the circumstances we're faced with. We've moved on minimum wage over the last number of years, and there's more to be done. I accept the fact that there are individuals across the province who believe we should move much more quickly. I accept that, and I respect that view.

Let me talk about municipalities for a little while. There's no question that the member from Beaches—East York is quite correct when he talks about property tax levels in the province of Ontario being among the highest. Why are they among the highest? Well, between 1995 and 2003, the government of the day embarked on a massive downloading program to Ontario's municipalities. They called it the "Who does what?" exercise; I always refer to it as the "Who got done in?" exercise. We know who got done in: It was municipalities in the province of Ontario that got done in.

The most unfortunate thing is that one of the most distinguished mayors of this great community of Toronto, the Honourable David Crombie, wrote a report for that government when they were in power and gave them a framework. What did Mr. Crombie suggest? He said that you never download income redistribution programs to the property tax, because the property tax is inherently a regressive tax. So what did Mr. Leach and his colleagues do? They downloaded income redistribution programs onto municipalities. That's exactly what happened. Social housing and all other social aspects were downloaded.

Interjection.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I hear the member saying, "That didn't happen." Ask any city councillor who served during that

period of time. Madam Speaker knows exactly that they got downloaded. What have we been doing as a government? We've been uploading some of those costs. We uploaded public health, on a cost-shared basis: 75% being funded by the province and 25% by the municipality. What has that meant for the city of Peterborough? The provincial contribution to public health in the city of Peterborough has risen from \$3 million to \$5 million. If they want to, I tell them, they can phone Brian Horton, the director of finance of the city of Peterborough, 742-7771, extension 248, and he'll verify the information that I've just provided. I'm sure Brian would like to talk to many of the members of the opposition. When he was director of finance, he tried to talk to them at that time about what the impact of downloading might be, but they didn't listen. That was a one-way conversation.

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What have we embarked upon? Well, we've embarked upon a systematic way, on a framework basis, to upload back to the province some of those things that were downloaded. We've certainly moved on public health. We've moved on the ODSP drug benefit. There's more that we will be doing. I look forward, at the end of this month, to Jim Watson, the very distinguished former mayor of Ottawa who is now the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, when he releases the framework plan that has been the subject of many deliberations. People have said we've extended the time frame. Exactly—we extended the time frame because we want to get it right. We don't want to rush in again to the famous "who got done in" committee. When the Conservatives were the government, they rushed into it, didn't listen to Crombie and just about killed municipalities in the province of Ontario. Again, if they want to talk to Brian Horton, it's 742-7771, extension 248, and he would be pleased to chat with them this afternoon.

We will be running a manageable deficit over the next little while, some \$500 million. It's really interesting because I was listening—let me get my notes here—to CBC News last night. Carole MacNeil was on, and who did Carole MacNeil interview? My good friend the federal finance minister, the Honourable Jim Flaherty. I want to quote the federal finance minister. He said, talking in the context that the federal government might run a deficit—I want the members opposite to listen very carefully—that he would not reduce transfers to destroy the social fabric in the country. He said that because there may be a prospect of running a deficit, he would not reduce the transfers to destroy the social fabric. This is exactly the path that we're following. We're saying that we're prepared to run a short-term, manageable deficit of some \$500 million so we don't ruin the social fabric of our transfer partners. Over the next little while we will slow the increase down, but we still respect our transfer partners, so they can depend on us to get those dollars.

Mr. Tim Hudak: You're cutting, but you respect them.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I hear my friend from Niagara Falls—Glanbrook. He was one of the members of the cabinet

during those eight long years when he was providing, I guess, expert advice on the "who got done in" committee, and I appreciate he's with us this afternoon to provide some insight.

It's interesting too that I hear now they've finally come clean on their \$5.6-billion deficit. For the longest time they were in denial, denial, denial that it actually existed. I heard the member a couple of days ago talk about how it was a circumstantial or consequential deficit because towards the end of that fiscal year of 2003—I agree that they had to deal with SARS, the blackout; there were a number of calamities that changed their fiscal situation. But that's not what they said during the campaign. Our good friend Madam Ecker—knowing full well, because she would have got briefs from her Ministry of Finance on a quarterly basis—kept saying through that whole campaign that the budget was indeed balanced. Isn't that interesting—\$5.6 billion. Even in late September, I remember, visiting my riding, that Madam Ecker said, "Guaranteed, everybody"—in late September, early October—as we went to the October 2003 election, that indeed the budget was balanced. Well, that doesn't square with what we're hearing from the opposition today. They're saying that there was this consequential deficit or situational deficit that added up to \$5.6 billion. I give them credit. As the priest in my church always says, "Confession is always good for the soul." So it's good to see that they're embarking on that way.

Interestingly, I also heard the member from Simcoe North today talk about farm programs in the province of Quebec. The Minister of Agriculture is in the House this afternoon. We all know about the ASRA farm support program in the province of Quebec. We also know about the \$7-a-day daycare in the province of Quebec. Who pays for that? It's the people of Ontario through equalization.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Can I please ask the members not to throw things around the chamber? Thank you.

Can you please continue, member for Peterborough?

Mr. Jeff Leal: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I have a few seconds left to use up.

It's really interesting what we hear. They used to talk about the Soviet Union revising history every five years, because that's the cycle they used to work on.

I am pleased. I think we have a plan in place that will carry us through the next number of months. Indeed, most economists remark that this is changing by the day. So we have a program that will carry us through the next several months as we get into our next budget cycle.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: It's quite interesting to hear the member opposite talk about Jim Flaherty, our present finance minister from the federal government, and hoping that he won't cut the transfers back. But I want to remind the member opposite that the federal Liberal government, in 1995-96, when we were facing an \$11.2-billion deficit taking over government, cut back

federal transfers by \$1.5 billion in that year alone. The next year, he continued to cut Ontario's transfers by another \$1 billion. We didn't get back to the level of transfers we had in 1994-95 until 2000-01. The federal government took over \$12 billion out of the hide of the Ontario government at that time.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Paul Martin?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Paul Martin. The federal Liberals downloaded so much cost to the provincial government, yet we never hear the Liberals talk about the big download by the federal government, which far exceeded any transfer of responsibility from the province to any municipalities. Look at the numbers.

Interjection.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I'll go on any debate and debate you, Mr. Leal. We'll talk about numbers, we'll talk about real numbers. And I can show you: They're in the public accounts of Ontario. The federal Liberals were disgraceful to the province of Ontario. They had no feelings at all.

I don't think Jim Flaherty and Stephen Harper are going to follow the example of the previous federal Liberal government, because they have more respect for the province of Ontario, notwithstanding the excessive spending of this present Liberal government.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently to my good friend from Peterborough because he referred to me on several occasions. I don't want to be like a trout rising to the bait, so I'm not going to do it. But he did talk about the download, which is near and dear to my heart, the download for municipalities. There is no doubt whatsoever that the download has been disastrous in the province of Ontario to the 480 or so municipalities that are still here. The download has caused them to put off infrastructure spending, has caused them to, in a majority of cases, be forced to raise taxes. That taxation is, of course, regressive because it comes from property taxation.

What has also happened, and I think what my friend ought not to be taking credit for, is the download that they inherited, or the download that existed at the time the Liberals first took office. It was estimated at some \$3.2 billion. That download has actually grown today, and if one looks at the taxes today, because of the rise in welfare costs and the rise in other costs that the municipalities are paying, it's now estimated at \$3.9 billion to \$4 billion. So in spite of the fact that the Liberals have started to upload a few of the costs, the actual cost to the municipalities continues to go up.

If we are to make the municipalities solvent, if we are to make them responsible for those things that they are required to do, then we have to move rapidly to get rid of that \$4 billion that they ought not to be spending. To do that would require some considerable courage, to upload it, on the part of this government. It would require the courage to say, "These are our programs, and we are going to tax to pay for them," as opposed to allowing

other levels of government to be forced to tax and remit. I think that is morally unjustifiable.

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The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bob Delaney: It is a pleasure to join this debate, and also to remark on what a cool and incisive analysis the member for Peterborough gave this particular issue. I think that one measure of it is the reaction of my colleagues from the Ontario republican party across. Sometimes you think they're way too right-wing even for George Bush.

We look at a former colleague of ours, Jim Flaherty, a gentleman I have always liked and respected, who is tiptoeing around the fact that he's going to run a deficit on behalf of the government of Canada. The members across have been talking about, "There was this circumstance," and, "There was that circumstance." Let's just compare apples with apples. Paul Martin's government, which Prime Minister Harper succeeded, handed over a \$13-billion surplus. The government that Mr. Chrétien and Mr. Martin succeeded in 1993, a Conservative government, was running a deficit of, let's see now, \$39 billion I think.

Some of my colleagues have talked about the Liberal government, and said, "You're tax-and-spend Liberals." I accept that. "Tax-and-spend Liberals" means that you live within your means. Let's look at what the Ontario PC Party/republican party proposes. They're borrow-and-spend Conservatives. I don't mind being a tax-and-spend Liberal, but I do object to being a borrow-and-spend Conservative like George Bush, who has spent his nation into—what is it?—\$10 trillion of debt. That's why this member gave such a good analysis.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I appreciate the opportunity to get into today's debate on the economy and this particular budget bill, Bill 114.

I notice that my good friend from Peterborough, as he often does, has brought forward his ideas and his version of reality. But let's bring him back. He wants to talk about what happened with Prime Minister Harper and Mr. Flaherty. I should remind him that between the years 1993 and 2006, the federal Liberals slashed and cut transfers to the provinces so that many provinces across this great country, including Ontario but also Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Quebec, all complained about what the federal Liberals did at the time, including Paul DeVillers, who at the time was the national caucus chair and an Ontario MP, and likened the province of Ontario to a group of separatists. Allan Rock, the previous Attorney General and health minister federally, acknowledged that they cut transfers to the bone. Yet when massive money started to come in, thanks to Mike Harris, who lobbied the federal government at the time for more money for health, their health minister, David Caplan, said it was too much money. These people and their tactics are shameful, including trying to rebrand the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario as they have done today.

Today, after record surpluses in good times, they projected a \$5.6-billion surplus this year. We are projecting at least a \$500-million deficit, and we on this side think it's at least \$1.2 billion. Where did \$7 billion go? They have to answer for that, and if they don't have an answer for the \$7 billion of Ontario taxpayers' money they squandered, then we are in a really serious mess.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Member for Peterborough for a response.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I certainly appreciate the insightful comments of my friends from Carleton-Mississippi Mills, Beaches-East York, Mississauga-Streetsville and Nepean-Carleton.

The record is—people want to know where the money went. I can tell you where it went, in increased spending: \$225 million to build a state-of-the-art hospital in Peterborough, Ontario. That's where a portion of it went.

Where did some of the other money go? It went to establish five family health teams in the riding of Peterborough. We took 10,000 people off the wait list for primary care over the last five years. Where else did it go? Well, \$150 million went to support some of the farmers in my riding in Peterborough, and the opposition wouldn't support that initiative by the Minister of Agriculture.

More money went into establishing the risk management program in the agricultural sector for our grains and oilseeds. That's where some of the money went to. In fact, we've been trying for the last number of years—this Minister of Agriculture—to convince the government of Canada to come to the table to become a true partner of our grains and oilseeds farmers, to help them go through what may be adjustments down the road. What did they say? I know what the federal Minister of Agriculture said. We could have people die in this country, a “death by a thousand cuts—that's cold cuts.” Or the very distinguished member from Prince Edward Island, saying, “Well, if there's another death, I hope it's the member from”—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Point of order, the member from Nepean-Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I really think the member may want to withdraw his comments with respect to—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): That's not a point of order. The member can bring whatever—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I'm sorry, it's not a point of order. The member can bring whatever debate he wishes, as long as it's within the rules of the House.

You can continue, and I'll give you a few extra seconds.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I know those remarks were made by the federal Minister of Agriculture. They're in the public domain. Those were exact quotes from him, and he's never denied that he made those quotes. So I stand—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I would ask members to please remember that this is your

chamber. There's another hour or so of debate left at the very least, and I would expect to have some order in the House and respect for each other as members. Thank you.

Further debate? The member for Niagara West-Glanbrook.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Just a quick question for the Speaker who is in the chair: If we're unsatisfied with the responses to questions and comments from the member from Peterborough, can we ask for a late show?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Thank you for the question, but you know very well that late shows are for question period. Continue.

Mr. Tim Hudak: With these new rule changes that are popping up every other week, who knows what the new rules will be.

I always enjoy my friend from Peterborough's comments. Obviously, he's been reading the Joe Biden history collection and listening to his remarks. Of course, Mr. Biden, a vice-presidential candidate, famously a week or two ago said that when Black Monday struck and the stock market crashed in 1929, FDR went on television to calm the nation. Of course, television was not available across the nation at that point in time, and FDR, of course, was not the president of the United States at that point in time. It was Herbert Hoover.

Interjection.

Mr. Tim Hudak: No, no, that was Mr. Biden. Obviously, you've been reading his biography very closely.

The one I'd recommend to you, too, is Paul Martin's biography, which I guess is just out, about his battles with Mr. Chrétien over time. As my colleague from Carleton-Mississippi Mills put it quite correctly, hopefully Mr. Martin will dedicate several chapters to how he really put the knives to the provincial governments when he was the finance minister by dramatically reducing transfer payments to not only the province of Ontario but to other provinces as well. It made it very challenging for governments across Canada at that time when Paul Martin chose to balance the books federally by dramatically decreasing transfers for health care and social services.

Thankfully, there have been some improvements lately. In fact, one of the items that is up in this fiscal year in the minister's economic statement from last week are the transfers from the federal government. The Stephen Harper government in Ottawa has increased transfers, as you know, to the province of Ontario and has helped, actually, the fiscal position of this current Liberal government's books, ironically.

Let me speak a little bit about that economic statement in the context of Bill 114 before the assembly here today. I'm still in a state of some disbelief—as I contemplated asking the Speaker about the member from Peterborough's comments, so maybe we'll defer that question till a little bit later on—about Dwight Duncan, the finance minister, coming to the Legislative Assembly, here in the chamber, just last Wednesday and announcing that the province of Ontario has gone back into deficit.

What was particularly shocking about this was that when the same minister rose in this assembly in March, some seven months ago, the books, he announced, were approximately \$6.4 billion in the black. There was approximately \$5.6 billion in additional revenue, greater than expenses, and the \$800-million, if I recall, reserve set aside. So there was a \$6.4-billion sum in the black, and for the minister now to come back and say that we are now \$500 million in the red is unbelievable. I'm still coming to grips with how the McGuinty government frittered away that substantial sum in this short period of time.

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What I hope to do in my comments on Bill 114 today is to contrast Ontario's position with other provinces like Quebec, British Columbia and Saskatchewan, which have come out recently with their own economic updates. What I'll show as well is that a startling omission in the finance minister's economic update was the absolute lack of any kind of job strategy. Certainly I think when you're back in your riding, Mr. Speaker, and my colleague is in Carleton-Mississippi Mills, the number one issue you'll hear about from your constituents is the state of the economy and the loss of well-paying jobs in the province of Ontario. No doubt, when seniors or any families are seeing the value of their investments and savings, seeing their RRSPs go through the wringer on this rollercoaster ride in the markets, they're very concerned about their economic affairs today and very concerned about their retirement tomorrow. Certainly those who are already in retirement and rely on a defined contribution pension plan have suffered real losses in their personal wealth and are making very difficult sacrifices today. There are seniors today, either at the Sobeys in Beamsville or the Fortinos in Stoney Creek, who are making real and difficult choices between filling up their grocery carts, paying their energy bills, and then coping with these massive assessment increases that they're getting in the mail this fall.

You would have thought, given those circumstances being experienced in every riding across the province, that the Minister of Finance would have brought forward some kind of economic plan, some kind of relief, some indication that he understands what families and seniors are going through in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario today, in 2008—and no doubt the Minister of Finance, hailing from Windsor, when Windsor and Essex county in many respects are in significant recessionary conditions—would have been attuned to what is happening in his own riding, let alone the challenges my constituents are facing today in western Niagara, upper Stoney Creek and the Glanbrook area. It's shocking.

In fact, earlier today, and I appreciate the assistance of the minister's office, we had a briefing with the Municipal Property Assessment Corp., MPAC, to help understand these massive assessments that are now hitting the pocketbooks of taxpayers in our ridings. My friend from Carleton-Mississippi Mills had some excellent questions for the MPAC staff, and I do thank MPAC staff for

taking the time to brief members of the PC caucus and our staff. What we learned in that was that Windsor and Essex county are actually the only areas of the province, I suspect, that are facing decreases in their assessments. So while folks in my riding will be getting assessment increases in the high double digits and some in the triple digit figures, depending on where they live, folks in Windsor are actually experiencing assessment losses. The unemployment rate in that community rivals the worst in all of Canada, and when you see the value of people's homes actually decreasing at a time of January 1, 2008, let alone the further decreases they've been experiencing this fall, you know that those communities are facing severe economic dislocation. That's why I was particularly shocked that the Minister of Finance had no new job strategy, no economic plan to help out working families and seniors facing these very difficult conditions.

I do believe that the vast majority of people in Ontario expect governments to make the same types of difficult but necessary decisions that they themselves make. At the end of month when you're trying to reconcile your bills with the paycheque that's coming in or your retirement savings, you need to make those difficult decisions, and I think people, particularly when they're paying higher taxes in the form of this new so-called health care tax, higher property taxes etc., expect the government to live within their means as well. Instead, we saw an approach by the McGuinty government in 2008 at odds with what families and small businesses are doing on a regular basis this year. The McGuinty government, instead of trying to spend prudently and make proper investments, went on a last-minute spending spree in the last fiscal year, a "spend, spend, spend" approach, fuelled by higher taxes, which meant they went from a \$6.4-billion position in the black to \$500 million in the red in a matter of months.

Let me also tell you why that's a significant number. Let's put this in perspective. If you look at the additional revenue that has come into the McGuinty government since it was elected in 2003, it's about \$28 billion, the largest component of which is higher taxes on the backs of middle-class families and seniors, predominantly, and businesses in the province. The second-largest increase would come from increased transfers from the federal government—so \$28 billion in additional revenue. Now, if you took the entire budgets of Manitoba and Saskatchewan and combined them, that actually falls short of \$28 billion. So the additional revenues are greater than the entire budgets of Manitoba and Saskatchewan put together. Despite that massive haul by the McGuinty government from middle-class families, seniors and businesses, they're still running this province into the red, which is incredible. I bet if you asked an average family watching today, or caught them in the street or inside a grocery store, they would be hard-pressed to say what they got in return for that massive spending increase.

So we find ourselves some \$500 million in deficit, potentially heading for a significantly worse deficit, as my colleague from Beaches-East York indicated in his remarks just a few minutes ago.

Let me also tell you why the \$500-million deficit was not necessary. When Minister Sorbara, the previous finance minister, was in that role, he regularly set aside a \$1-billion reserve fund. The reserve fund is something the finance minister sets aside in case the economy heads south, in case there's a major disaster like SARS, for example, that we sadly went through a number years ago, in order to cushion the blow so that if expenses increase or revenues fall, you've got a gap there, you've got a safety cushion, so to speak, so you don't fall into deficit. Minister Sorbara regularly had surpluses of \$1 billion, and in fact, Minister Sorbara announced in his last budget that surpluses would rise in future years, including this year, to \$1.5 billion. So taxpayers could reasonably expect that the McGuinty government would set aside a reserve fund of \$1.5 billion in case the economy turned south or there was some other disaster.

Secondly, governments tend to have a contingency fund. If a ministry is forced to overspend, if the Minister of Finance decides not to have them find it within their own ministry or from another ministry, it would tap into this contingency fund. In ways, it's a secondary cushion to the reserve fund. In the 2007-08 budget, the contingency funds were \$580 million for operating, \$175 million for capital. In the 2008-09 budget brought forward by Minister Duncan last March, the operating contingency fund was reduced by \$160 million to \$420 million.

Now, if times were good, if they were booming, if you saw bright sunshine on the horizon, you could say, well, maybe we don't need as big of a reserve fund or contingency fund or as big of a cushion, if you were confident that things were heading onward and upward. But I think, as you would agree, that we all knew, heading into 2008, that there were some significant storm clouds on the horizon. We saw what has happening in the United States and, because Ontario is an exporting economy, that we would be vulnerable to any downturn in the American economy. No doubt, a massive canary in the coal mine, so to speak, would be the 200,000-plus well-paying manufacturing jobs that have fled our province under the McGuinty government—sadly, far too many in my regions of Hamilton and Niagara.

We also knew, and the minister's own projections show, that the economy of Ontario was going to slow. He overestimated to what extent Ontario's economy would grow, but he still had what he described as a relatively cautious outlook at the time for economic growth.

So despite the fact that we knew we were heading for challenging times in the upcoming year, the Minister of Finance chose to dramatically reduce the safety cushion, dramatically reduce the reserve fund, and to significantly reduce the contingency fund. If he had kept at the level of caution that his predecessor, Mr. Sorbara, had indicated he would pursue as Minister of Finance, we would not be in a deficit today; that the increased reserve and contingency funds would more than make up for a shortfall that we've seen on the revenue side. Unfortunately, when I asked the Minister of Finance this today, I didn't get a

direct answer. I don't know what his thinking was back in March of this year, 2008—when he knew that tough times were ahead, when he indicated in his budget and his budget speech there were challenging times ahead—that he would choose to cut the safety cushion, so to speak; that he would choose to reduce the reserve and the contingency funds and spend that money. As a result, because he threw good caution to the wind, we are much more vulnerable to changes in the American economy and we've found ourselves \$500 million in deficit as of October 2008.

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To make matters worse, not only was it imprudent of the Minister of Finance to reduce our reserve and contingency funds heading into a difficult year—and I hope maybe one of my colleagues opposite will have an explanation and defend the wisdom behind that reduction, but I fail to see it. I don't think there will be an explanation as to why it was, in the minister's view, a good thing to reduce that margin of safety in the reserve and contingency funds.

But to make matters worse, when the year began, the McGuinty government could not take its foot off the accelerator and continued to spend, spend, spend. In fact, in the first and second quarters of this year they had spent an additional \$325 million in unbudgeted spending. You would think that if you knew the economy was heading downward, if you saw what was happening in the States and other countries, you would say to your cabinet colleagues, "If you have additional spending, try to find it within your own ministry; and if you can't, try to find it in another ministry, because we cannot have unbudgeted spending." Sadly, whether due to lack of foresight or lack of any kind of planning, the finance minister and the McGuinty government proceeded with some \$325 million in unbudgeted spending increases.

Let me give you some examples. The Board of Internal Economy was increased by \$22.4 million this fiscal year. That was in the first quarter of this year. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services, \$11.6 million; executive offices, \$1.1 million; the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services was up in spending; and in the second quarter, \$187.5 million in the Ministry of Education for school board expenses. I understand that is related to the collective bargaining agreement, which increased teachers' salaries by 3% a year over four years, for a 12% increase. Again, that was unbudgeted spending. That was not part of the minister's forecast as recently as March. There was a \$100-million increase in OHIP billing, the Ministry of Health; \$7.1 million for OMERS. Anyway, it all adds up to approximately \$325 million in unbudgeted spending only halfway through the year.

If you combine those two factors, between the reserve funds being cut and the dramatic unbudgeted spending—dramatic in that we knew we were heading for some fiscal challenges—the provincial books would actually be in the black this year, not \$500 million into deficit, as the minister announced just last week.

I know my colleague from Peterborough had talked about where all this spending went. He had suggested that the Peterborough hospital was a beneficiary of this increase in operating funds. The reality, though, is that because of the accounting changes that have been made, most of the capital funds are simply financed through an increase in provincial debt and, as I indicated when I responded to the Minister of Finance's economic statement, the debt increase in the McGuinty government has been huge. I think I calculated it at the time to be approximately \$31 billion in additional debt, which worked out to a significant increase for every household in the province of Ontario.

Here are some of the numbers, Madam Speaker, just for your information. As of September 30, 2008, the total debt in Ontario has continued to climb all the way to \$172 billion. That's basically \$13,500 in debt for every woman, man and child in the province of Ontario or \$38,000 for every household. Despite the fact that these record revenues were coming in, and despite the fact that federal transfers had increased, the McGuinty government still went on a borrowing spree and has increased the total debt per household by \$8,705.35.

Now, here's the problem with deficits and here's the problem with borrowing: You've got to pay that back. If you want to take out a loan, you go to the bank and take out the loan—or the credit union—and then you have to pay down that debt and you have to pay down the interest on it. Typically, any government would be the same. To use that analogy, now, because of the \$500 million and the increased debt, the government of Ontario has to go and borrow it either domestically through the banks, or internationally, and then taxpayers will have to finance that down the road through increased taxes to pay down the debt and the interest that goes along with it.

Secondly, when you—as this government does—sort of shrug and pass on a deficit, what you do is leave government spending unchallenged. What a deficit should motivate is a line-by-line review, through each ministry, of how those dollars are spent. Are they getting the best bang for the buck? Are there more efficient ways of delivering programs? Have some programs outlived their usefulness? Is there a better way of doing it? Or are two ministries doing basically the same thing and doubling the expenses for a single purpose? There seems to be a complete failure of the McGuinty government to review their \$97 billion or so in spending, to try to find ways to find savings, and \$500 million on a nearly \$100-billion budget works out to one half cent on one dollar. I think that almost everybody watching this evening would agree that there's more waste in government spending than simply one half of one cent on every dollar. So, by just allowing for a deficit to pass without any significant review, you allow bad spending habits to proceed and then become part of an ongoing reckless spending reputation of the McGuinty government.

A third thing is that once you start getting into deficits, once you get on that deficit treadmill, it's awfully hard to get off. There are hundreds of billions of dollars, and as I said, in the province of Ontario, \$172 billion because

governments, particularly through the 1970s, 1980s and into the early to mid-1990s, kept running deficit after deficit and piling up that debt, because they wanted to leave the difficult and necessary decisions to future generations. One of the central problems in the McGuinty government is that they're trying to be all things to all people, spending in every area without setting real priorities. What we saw last week in the economic statement was the lack of any kind of leadership or courage to make the difficult but necessary decisions to get the province back into a balanced or a surplus position.

There are a number of things I wanted to cover, in addition, in tonight's discussion. Let's look at some of the alternatives. All the Canadian provinces deal with the same dollar. All Canadian provinces trade with the States, China and other countries, and are being impacted by state of those economies. All provinces face the same price of oil. All provinces face the same repercussions from their citizens' investments in the stock markets. But Ontario now stands, after Wednesday's bad news, along with Prince Edward Island as the only province in all of Canada to be in deficit. The other Premiers have looked at their financial situations, facing the same challenges and have made decisions to try to stimulate their economies, to try to help create jobs in their provinces, as opposed to blithely moving forward with the same failed economic plan and going back into deficit.

I say to my friend from Ottawa-Orléans, if the province had spent at a rate of inflation plus population growth, a relatively generous rate of increased spending—so, the rate of inflation in the economy plus the population growth in the province of Ontario from the time they were in office—they would actually have had \$7 billion left over. In other words, they spent \$7 billion more than they would have if they had targeted spending at inflation plus population growth—a very reasonable figure. That would have meant, like the other provinces, that they had \$7 billion of room to reduce the tax burden on families and on seniors, and to reduce the tax burden on small businesses, or all businesses, to help make Ontario a friendly environment for investment. They could have used \$7 billion to invest in key infrastructure like the mid-peninsula corridor, which would help communities in Hamilton and Niagara attract more jobs. But instead it was all basically put into runaway program spending—by the way, a 50% increase in program spending under the McGuinty government. I bet if you asked the average person tonight who's trying to pay for the grocery bill at their local Sobeys, they would be hard pressed to say what they had seen as a result of that massive spending.

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So the province of Saskatchewan is facing some of the same challenges as Ontario. Premier Brad Wall tapped into his government's estimated \$3-billion surplus but had planned to raise the basic personal and spousal amounts for tax exemption by \$4,000 each and to hike the child tax credit by \$2,000. Not only did Premier Wall bring forward those tax reductions, but he also made them retroactive for all of 2008, bringing savings of more

than \$1,300 a year for a typical family with two children. It also means, quite happily, that 80,000 low-income taxpayers will no longer pay any provincial income tax at all in Saskatchewan.

My friend from Beaches—East York talked about the importance of a poverty plan, which has sort of gone AWOL under the McGuinty government, and no doubt taking 80,000 low-income taxpayers off the tax rolls would be an important part of any poverty reduction program, along with the job creation plan that was missing from the McGuinty government's announcements of last week.

In addition to the tax cuts, Saskatchewan is putting more money into infrastructure and putting \$1 billion from its rainy-day Growth and Financial Security Fund into paying down provincial debt. The government has said it also plans to reduce the education portion of property taxes and to increase the support program for low-income seniors.

What a contrast. We've got two provinces facing the same international challenges. The province of Ontario, because of Dalton McGuinty's high taxes, his runaway spending, his higher rates for hydro, his increased red tape, was weakened and had great challenges in fending off these international forces. Secondly, because of its rapid spending increases, it did not have the funds set aside to stimulate the economy like Saskatchewan has. Ontario should have had \$7 billion if they had spent at that rate; in fact, now, because Dalton McGuinty overspent, we're \$500 million in the red.

The Toronto Sun on October 23 juxtaposed the two plans: "With Ontario projecting a \$500-million deficit ... Saskatchewan was bucking the trend with tax cuts and a budget surplus."

From a Canadian Press story the same day: "Experts say Saskatchewan, long considered an economic backwater, will be among the strongest provincial performers, outstripping the former manufacturing powerhouse of Ontario and Alberta's once red-hot oil patch."

A couple of provinces over, British Columbia, again facing some very significant challenges, as we have; very dependent on the forestry sector as well. Its trade toward Asia will be diminished because of the state of some of the economies it would trade with. Instead of running a deficit, instead of just injecting more money, without setting priorities, into program spending, Premier Gordon Campbell brought forward a 10-point plan. Again, it may not have been a 10-point plan I'd expect from McGuinty, but I would have expected something from the Premier and his finance minister as part of a jobs and economic development strategy in their economic statement.

Gordon Campbell brought forward a 10-point plan. Here are a couple of the items: an unlimited deposit insurance for deposits in credit unions, an accelerated retroactive personal income tax cut, a school property tax rebate for industry, accelerated tax relief for small business, and accelerated public infrastructure investment. That works out to about \$201 million in British Columbia for this year, not including capital spending, without sliding into a deficit.

The Globe and Mail, October 23, said, "Premier Gordon Campbell vowed to keep British Columbia a 'deficit-free zone' even as he outlined a plan last night to cut taxes and boost spending in response to a slowing economy." Premier Campbell himself said in the Toronto Star, "We will continue to live within our means and within our taxpayers' ability to pay."

Some of the items I had mentioned, I'll go into in a bit more detail. The unlimited deposit insurance for deposits to credit unions: Now BC will come into line with Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, PEI and New Brunswick; Quebec, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland cover up to \$250,000. So Ontario's now at the back of pack, covering only up to \$100,000 per registered account in credit unions. BC is doing unlimited deposit insurance as part of Premier Campbell's 10-point plan.

Interesting too is a new pension opportunity. Small businesses often have great difficulty setting aside money for their own pensions, let alone for their employees. Based on the joint expert panel on pension standards that BC did with Alberta, they're bringing forward a private sector pension opportunity: a defined contribution plan to help self-employed people, and employers and employees who don't have a pension plan, which would certainly be an interesting opportunity for us to investigate here in Ontario.

I mentioned the accelerated retroactive personal tax cut, which British Columbia is carrying through with, and accelerating tax relief for small businesses. Interestingly, "Double commission paid to business for PST and HRT collection: The province will double the commission it pays business for collecting the provincial sales tax and hotel room tax." That adds up to about 1,200 bucks to a business's bottom line over the three years of the program.

There are some changes in ferry fares, which, aside from the Chi-Cheemaun and one or two others, wouldn't be as relevant to the province of Ontario. Importantly, "The province will re-evaluate spending priorities and focus on scaling back unbudgeted increases," while here, in the economic statement, as I mentioned, there's some \$325 million of unbudgeted spending in the first two quarters of the year alone.

Last, I want to mention Quebec: very manufacturing based, as is the province of Ontario, and trade based. I believe Quebec will come up with an economic update later this week. However, in its recent budget 2008-09, Quebec brought forward immediate elimination of the capital tax for all manufacturing companies, a new investment tax credit for the purchase of manufacturing and processing equipment—the rate varies depending on what part of the province they're from—a regional economic development program for municipalities that have been hard hit, and a tax credit for new information technology companies corresponding to 30% of the salaries for jobs related to innovative activities.

Sadly and bizarrely, while other provinces that are facing the same international economic circumstances have found ways to try to stimulate their economies, have found ways to try to help create jobs in their provinces—

well-paying jobs to replace lost manufacturing jobs—have found ways to help seniors and middle-class families make ends meet under these very challenging economic circumstances, and have found ways to help low-income individuals and families get ahead under some very difficult circumstances, Ontario stands alone as a province that is going in the opposite direction with high taxes, runaway spending and no new ideas in the economic statement tabled this past week. I do hope we will see the finance minister and the Premier come forward with some new ideas in the time ahead, because that response was sadly lacking and sadly out of touch with the realities faced by Ontario families today. I look forward to the comments from my colleagues.

I want to ask a question as well, because I have not had a chance to be fully briefed on this bill. Schedule F of Bill 114 amends the Executive Council Act. When they were in opposition, Dalton McGuinty and a number of his ministers made it a regular question to ask about absences of ministers from question period, and they brought forward legislation to guarantee that ministers would be here for a certain number of question periods. It appears that now they're safely past the recent election, they're planning on watering this down:

"Subsection 7(2) of the Act is repealed and the following substituted:

"(2) A day on which a minister is absent from the chamber is not counted as an absence for the purpose of this section if the Premier is of the opinion that the absence is justified because of,

"(a) illness, bereavement, a religious holiday or some similar reason;" understandable, "or

"(b) international travel related to trade or economic development."

Mr. Kim Craitor: That's good.

Mr. Tim Hudak: My friend says, "That's good." Holy cats, you could drive a Mack truck or a 747 carrying all the ministers on the latest junket through clause 7(2)(b) of schedule F. I expect that through this loophole we'll now see maybe not my friend the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities but other ministers travelling with large groups in tow. Premier McGuinty, by way of example, is noted among the press as somebody who carries with him the largest group of staffers of any Premier when he travels. I fear that if schedule F does pass, the Premier will be granting a blank cheque to his ministers to go on junkets across the world at a time when families and seniors are paying higher taxes, are getting whacked by massive assessment increases, are having difficulty making ends meet and seeing the value of their savings and investments depleted in the stock markets. And all of a sudden, Dalton McGuinty is going to send his ministers on an international travelling medley in the time ahead.

I hope that schedule F is amended when we have a chance to look at this bill. I'll leave it at that and look forward to the comments of my colleagues.

1710

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently, as I always do, to my good friend from Niagara West—Glanbrook. He and I often share stages together as the finance critic for the two opposition parties and I always listen with great interest to what he has to say.

For the first time today, though, I finally heard something on poverty from the Conservative Party. I have not heard in a long, long time any questions asked in the House or statements made on the issue of poverty, so I was very keen to listen. He did talk about something—an idea which I had not heard explored here before—and that is, simply, income tax cuts for the poor. I have not heard that and it was refreshing to hear that there is this idea being floated around to remove some 80,000 people off the tax rolls. I'm not convinced that that is much of an answer because I'm not sure how much income tax is being paid or, if you're reducing the lowest-paid people, how much money, in fact, they are actually going to be saved or they are actually going to save apiece. But it is refreshing to hear that there is some empathy being considered here and that they do have a program when it comes to the poor.

He went on to talk about other provinces and what they're doing. I think that this is a little bit of a dangerous game, because each province has their own strengths and weaknesses and each province has their own expectations from their communities. So it is often difficult to say—if British Columbia is able to do something that Manitoba is not or that Newfoundland is or is not, and juxtapose that with Ontario—that a program that works elsewhere will work here. Having said that, I think we need to pay some attention to what he had to say in terms of new programs; it's not so much the spending, but it's the new programs. Where are they able to institute new programs? And can we learn anything from them? I would hope the government takes a good look at what he had to say on those issues.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely: The member for Niagara West—Glanbrook was part of that \$5.6-billion deficit that we were left with in 2003. That was in good times, and now he's concerned about a \$500-million deficit.

We have the Bush-type thinking—the US took that good Clinton surplus, moving ahead for years, and they've almost bankrupted the country. Of course, it impacts us severely, and we have to take the steps we're taking. The right-wing conservative deregulations of the US, as worshiped by Harper and Harris and Hudak—this is what has got us into trouble, with sub-prime mortgages that collapsed the whole financial market in the US and across the world. And then we have you standing up here and you're talking about taking steps that we're taking as a government to try to buttress ourselves against that.

I'm pleased that our federal Liberals in the 1990s got rid of that I think \$39-billion annual deficit, \$40-billion annual deficit, and then they got the country on the right footings, and they didn't deregulate our banks like they did in the US—like the right-wing thinkers let the money

markets go where they wish and not have any regulations. We haven't done that. We've got a good, strong banking system here. But because 80% of our goods go to the US, of course, we have to take steps, and we're taking those steps. Those are the five points in the plan: the training; the infrastructure, which was so lacking in the 1990s, which has been brought back since 2003 with this government to get it going again; research and innovation that should be—where's the federal money for research and innovation? It's almost not there. It should be there. We're putting it in. Lowering business costs and all the work that the small business minister has done in getting rid of all those rules etc. We have helped manufacturing and so—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Thank you.

Mr. Phil McNeely: —I really think that you have to—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to rise to comment on my colleague from Niagara West—Glanbrook's excellent speech. He has raised some really excellent examples from other jurisdictions.

But I don't want us to lose track of why we are talking about a deficit. I want to highlight some examples for the chamber about some ways that perhaps the McGuinty Liberals could have prudently chosen a different route. Some of the spending that has gone on in the last number of years:

—\$2.3 million spent on the opening gala of Caesar's Windsor—is that prudent?

—\$8 million for the next two years to conduct research on new tourism markets, also called the Sorbara retirement tour—is that prudent?

—\$3.5 million spent by the Ministry of Education on hotel and conference facilities;

—\$6 million to remove the "C" from the OLG, Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp.;

—\$20 million to quietly give raises to appointees to government agencies and boards;

—\$2 million for an inaccurate, partisan advertisement about health care;

—\$91 million to fire nurses;

—\$90 million to close or consolidate community care access centres.

I could go on, but I think the point is that for a government that espouses prudence in their decision-making, the proof is in the pudding, and the pudding is that there are lots of decisions that have been made by this McGuinty Liberal government and the ministers within it that show there is no prudence happening.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments? The member for Ottawa Centre.

Applause.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, for the applause.

I think this is my first opportunity ever to respond to the member from Niagara West—Glanbrook, so I'm taking this opportunity to do so.

I was listening quite intently, as was my friend from Beaches—East York, to what the member had to say about this particular budget bill. He went into an extensive narrative about comparing Ontario with other provinces, but what he neglected to talk about was how diverse our economies are in this country; that each province is different and each province's economy is different. You really cannot take the economy in Saskatchewan, Quebec or British Columbia and then compare it to Ontario and say, "Look, things are not working."

While he was quite eloquently talking about all the different tax cuts that have been offered in other provinces, he forgot to mention the tax cuts we have instilled here in Ontario under the McGuinty government: the elimination of capital tax for all manufacturing and resource sector industries, retroactive to January 1, 2007; the elimination of capital tax on other businesses, which will be completed by 2010. What about the impact on those businesses of bringing business costs down? It's something which has been hailed and congratulated by all economists across the province, saying that this is the kind of tax cut we need to bring in. We have to keep in mind that we are bringing in prudent tax cuts to ensure that our businesses prosper.

As to his comments about schedule F: On the one hand, the opposition laments the fact that we're not doing enough to create jobs, but on the other hand, when we want the tools, the capacity to create those jobs by making sure that we bring investors from abroad to Ontario, that's not good enough.

We can't just sit here in a globalized economy and expect that jobs will come, that the investors will come to Ontario. We have to make sure that we go out there and market Ontario, the great potential, the great skill that exists in this province, to ensure that foreign investors—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Thank you.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: —choose Ontario as the place for investment.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Thank you. To the member for Niagara West—Glanbrook for a response.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Thanks to my colleagues all, and particularly to the member from Dufferin—Caledon, who probably could have gone on for an hour herself with all the examples of wasteful Liberal spending. I bet that none of the members here went to the \$2.1-million, black-tie gala at the opening of the Windsor casino, but—

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I wasn't invited.

Mr. Tim Hudak: No, I don't think we were invited. I think Liberal members and lobbyists and hangers-on probably were around the roulette table that evening.

To my two colleagues from Ottawa, I gave three examples of three provinces. Sure, every province is different; that's why I gave three different types of prov-

inces: to indicate that despite the various different economies—Quebec would be different from BC, which would be different from Saskatchewan—all have found ways to bring forward a job-creation plan and some plan to try to bring relief to hard-pressed families and seniors in their provinces. Ontario stands alone in not bringing forward any kind of vision or any kind of a plan to help create jobs in this province or, secondly, to bring relief to those families. By way of illustration, three different provinces, three moving in one direction and Ontario stands alone at standing pat, running a deficit and seeing jobs flee.

1720

Interjections.

Mr. Tim Hudak: My colleagues in the Liberal benches are also crying out, “What about our tax cuts?” They’re trying to claim credit for taxes. The reality is that you increased taxes, in the largest tax increase in the history of this province, on the backs of seniors, on the backs of families, and on the backs of small and large businesses. And then other tax reductions were delayed. The capital tax should have been gone some time ago. It’s still around because the McGuinty government postponed those tax cuts. So the Liberals trying to pat themselves on the back for reducing taxes is like a bank robber who had just robbed a bank going back to the bank and trying to make a deposit, wondering why they’re not at all grateful.

You increased taxes through the roof. They’re among the highest taxes now in all of North America, and we have to come down further to help create jobs.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It’s a pleasure to rise and speak. Unfortunately, I was in committee so I didn’t hear all of the pearls of wisdom from my colleagues in the House—except for some, and I heard those from the member from Ottawa Centre before I had to go down to sit in committee. So I’ll respond, in part, to him.

What I heard was a pretty glowing description of life in the economy of Ontario. It seemed almost utopic. Quite frankly, that is not the reality that the vast majority of Ontarians are experiencing. We hear, of course, from our colleagues across the floor that we are a small province in a big world that is experiencing great turbulence on the economic front. I was down with my husband at a conference—a very interesting one—for eastern seaboard legislators. We had state reps from a number of different states, as well as MPPs and MLAs from a number of different provinces. We listened there to a Democratic pollster, and he said that something quite remarkable had happened in the psyche of Americans. He said that for the first time in the history of polling in the United States, this generation of voters expects that their children will be worse off than they are. This is not the American dream, and it’s not the Canadian dream, either. The hope here—and we are nations of immigrants—is that you work hard and your children do better than you, that they don’t do worse than you.

But it doesn’t take a historian to experience what many in this House have experienced with their children, and that is exactly what the pollster found out: that it’s more difficult for our young people now than it was for us, and that in fact it was more difficult for us than it was for our parents. We all remember back to the days—and of course this is not true of everyone, but it certainly was true of more—that on one salary you could own a home, own a car and, for the very lucky, own a cottage. I would put out to the colleagues of this House that now it takes at least two salaries, if you’re very lucky, to consider buying a house and a car, and it’s only for the very rich that cottages are even a possibility. So that’s a change in one lifetime, and now we’re seeing that change accelerate.

It’s really interesting for the proponents of capitalism, by which we in the New Democratic Party are surrounded in this House, to see a free market economy and the free market touted as being the answer to all problems, and then the likes of a Bush coming up with socialist measures when the free market fails—which it is. Let us make no doubt about it, the free market is failing. It is failing around the world. But it’s an interesting sort of socialism that’s brought in. It’s a socialism for the rich only. If you’re poor and you don’t have any capital, it’s capitalism for you, but if you’re a bank, if you’re a wealthy corporation, if you’re part of the Fortune 500 and you run into some financial difficulties, then the government’s there to bail you out. We’ve seen this in the States, and it’s been dramatic.

So certainly as a social democrat, it doesn’t warm my heart; it’s a tragedy. But I look to Europe. Again, they’re experiencing troubles there, but certainly the way the troubles are trickling down to those who are working is a little bit less traumatic than we’re seeing here in the States with the lack of social services.

My husband and I went to Sweden. It’s fascinating to see this trading country, a country of only nine million people—we have 13 million, more or less, in Ontario—which has a vibrant economy: Sony Ericsson, Ikea, H&M, Volvo. They have put into place some of the policies that we in the New Democratic Party are recommending that the McGuinty government put into place, things like “Buy Ontario.” Guess what? When you go to Sweden, about every third or fourth person is driving a Volvo. There’s a reason for that. They have policies to “Buy Swedish” for their citizens. They have policies in place that encourage research and development in their homegrown industries, trading etc., and, of course, consuming their own products. That’s one of the recommendations that we’ve put forward, one of the recommendations this government has not picked up.

We’ve put forward a recommendation for less expensive hydro rates—again, another policy that this government has not picked up. We’ve put forward, as New Democrats, a policy to cushion those who live in poverty and to raise them out of poverty. And not all of the recommendations that we’ve put forward cost tax dollars. This is why it’s so troubling on this side of the

floor to New Democrats to see the government sit on its hands and do nothing about poverty, despite all the promises, when in fact many of the suggestions we've made wouldn't cost a tax dime: suggestions like raising the minimum wage to a living wage—\$10.25. It was the "\$10 minimum wage" campaign; it's now the \$10.25 wage campaign, indexed to inflation. Why? Because automatically, de facto that would raise about a million Ontarians out of poverty because they would be making a minimum wage above the poverty line. It wouldn't cost a tax dime and it wouldn't cost small business, much as we hear that complaint. In fact, as a small business critic, I can tell you that only about 29% of the jobs paying minimum wage come from small business. The vast majority of jobs paying minimum wage are big-business jobs; they're jobs at Wal-Mart, they're jobs at McDonald's, they're jobs for multinational firms where the profits, quite frankly, go out of this country and don't stay here. Asking for a living wage would force those multinational companies to actually invest in their communities in a reasonable, ethical and compassionate way, and that is to pay a living wage. Again, it wouldn't cost a dime.

What else could this government do? First of all, it could actually give some weight to employment standards legislation; that is, it could enforce employment standards legislation. We do not have employment standards in the province of Ontario because we do not enforce employment standards in the province of Ontario. Millions and millions of dollars of unpaid wages go uncollected, and who does not collect those wages? It's not the middle class; it's not the wealthy. Predominantly, it's those who are immigrants, those at the lower end of the earning spectrum, who aren't aware of their rights, who don't have time to hire a lawyer, who don't know the process or can't access the process. Those are the people who are not collecting the unpaid wages, and that is an absolute travesty of justice.

Certainly no inspection is happening. I've called for, in a motion, that 25% of all places of employment be blitzed, be inspected, and that when the egregious and outrageous examples of employment standards breaches are discovered, they be given more than a slap on the wrist; that they actually be fined something meaningful and that their company names be posted so people know who are exploiting virtually slave labour in some instances—those employees out there.

Precarious employment now represents 37% of all jobs in Ontario. Precarious employment: That's temporary employment, part-time employment, contract employment. Yet this government has done nothing about temporary agencies. It can't even bring itself to license them. We all know that a licence is just a piece of paper on a wall, never mind giving teeth to a licensing process, never mind cracking down on those who exploit those who work at the lowest-paid jobs in the province.

So again, looking at the employment standards, looking at temporary agencies, looking at the whole area of contract, temporary, seasonal work that doesn't pay a living wage.

1730

This government boasts about creating jobs, and quite frankly, that's sad. It's tragic because we know 230,000 jobs have been lost in this province. Many of those jobs were actually good, living-wage jobs, manufacturing jobs, some of them union jobs. Those jobs are lost, and they're replaced with what? I'd say they're replaced not with living-wage jobs, they're replaced with part-time, contract, temporary, call centre McJobs. That's what's replaced them. So to boast that there's an increase in employment is a sad commentary when you actually look at the widening gap in Ontario between the wealthy and the poor, the haves and the have-nots. The changing face of poverty in this province is a working face. It is not a person who is on social assistance. It's a working face. It's somebody who is working full time and still earning less than is required to feed their children, to put education on the table, to pay the rent or to even hope one day of buying a property. It's a working face, the face poverty.

Of course, my colleague from Beaches–East York has spoken eloquently and often about the plight of those on social assistance. We know that they're making far less than they were almost 20 years ago in real dollars. We know that somebody on ODSP who cannot work—that's why they're on disability—is now being forced to live below the poverty line. Now, on any ethical plane, for any scale of compassion, surely across the way one has to admit that someone who cannot work should not be condemned to live in poverty by a province still as wealthy, in a worldwide sense, as Ontario. This is simply outrageous. It's simply morally and ethically unacceptable.

So we have poverty for those who live on social assistance, we have poverty for those who work, and we have an increasing number of those who live in poverty. If we think it won't touch us, then stand back, because it will. There was a story in the *Globe* that really hit home to me. It hit home to me because it described not only those on social assistance, not only those, many of whom I have as my constituents, who work at minimum wage, who work two or three jobs just to get by, but it began to describe what we would call the middle class in the province of Ontario. It was the story of a man in Windsor who had lost his good CAW job; it was a good union job that paid a middle class salary. This poor man had to renegotiate his mortgage. Most of us are aware that most banks and mortgage lenders will not mortgage a house to more than 80% of its value. Well, guess what happened to this poor individual? House values, because of dropping real estate values, particularly in the hard-hit community of Windsor, were dropping. So his house value had dropped, and his mortgage, which he had been trying to live on because he had lost his job, was now more than 80% of the value of his house. So no lending institution would lend him the money. This is an individual who is going to lose his house.

Now I ask you to look at your sons and daughters; many of us have grown sons and daughters in this House,

many of us know young people who are certainly mortgaged to within 80% of the value of their house. It's difficult to buy property in a city the size of Toronto, or in many of our urban centres across Ontario, where you're not mortgaged to 80% of the value of your property. I ask you to imagine, if that property dips in value—all it has to dip is 20% and your mortgage comes due, and you have to renegotiate—the state that you will be in, the situation you will find yourself in. We're not so different from our neighbours to the south. And what does this government do in response to this? The answer is not much, precious little, words. We get words. We get a resolution that says they acknowledge the problem. We get words, and we get the suggestion that we're going to move into a deficit. We don't have an active strategy by which jobs will be created, by which that poor gentleman in Windsor is going to be able to turn his life around.

We have a job training program where just over 1,000 people have taken up the program, whereas we have 230,000 who have lost their jobs. For somebody in their fifties it's going to be difficult to retrain if they have come from a middle-class income, a good union job, to do something that will pay them the same amount of money. What happens when their mortgages come due?

My colleague from Beaches–East York has also done some really important work on property taxes. I know that every member here is getting calls from their constituents about their new MPAC assessments. I have seniors in my riding who are in danger of losing their house just because of their increase in taxes. They have paid their houses off completely, but they are living on fixed incomes. Guess what's happening to fixed incomes? If you're not lucky enough to have a pension, and even if you are, depending on how those funds are invested, if you have retired on anything that has anything to do with the stock market, then you are in trouble indeed. Then, just as you're reeling from that blow, your MPAC assessment comes in to tell you that you're going to be paying more in taxes. You can't afford it. What are our seniors going to do?

So we have two groups of people who are hardest hit. We have our seniors on fixed incomes on the one hand; we have our young people on the other hand who are just trying to get started.

Of course, I think of my colleague from Trinity–Spadina and the work that he has done around education. We now have the highest level of student debt in the country. This is again absolutely unacceptable. So the same couple that is going to be mortgaged to 80% of their first property, their first home, is going to also be carrying a huge student debt, not only into their twenties but into their thirties, and most of them into their forties, before they have paid it off—\$28,000 to \$30,000.

Again, we're saddling those who can afford it the least with the brunt of what is going to be, most experts agree, a recession. So here we're looking at a situation in which the government needs to act, and we have a government that isn't acting, a government that, just like George Bush, depends on the market, hopes for the market, prays

for the market to recoup, recover, do something, because they're not. They're not going to intervene, they're not going to do anything substantive to create new jobs in a meaningful way—no jobs commissioner over there, no investment tax credit, of course, for manufacturers the way we proposed, no tax-free measures even for those who are hardest hit and who are the working poor, no living wage, no increased ODSP rates, no housing policy.

I heard a member speak about \$100 million into housing. Well, let us be very clear: Those are not Ontario dollars. This is a government that hasn't even spent the federal dollars that they have received on housing. This is a government with no housing policy. Again, who will that hurt the most? Not those who are boomers among us, not those who have good jobs among us, but those who are the working poor, those seniors. That's who it is going to hurt the most—the young and the older.

I just have a couple of minutes left. As small business critic, I have to say that small business is, as we all know, the major employer in this province, and small business is getting no breaks at all from this government. Small business has been asking over and over again for reform of the business education tax across the province, and has yet to see any meaningful reform that's really going to put money into their pockets. Certainly, 416 businesses are paying way more, proportionately, than 905 businesses. They're asking for that. There's no such thing as anything like controls on commercial rents; hence, we see gouging going on for many small retailers. There is much that small business needs from this government, and small business gets extremely little, if anything at all—a nod, but nothing real.

Meanwhile, we have the minister of somewhere else rushing off to China, rushing off to India, looking to create—what?—jobs in a country that my son has taught English in and said, “You know, really they're known for one thing, in terms of their labour market in China, and that's sweatshops.” How is travelling to China going to provide meaningful union jobs for Ontarians? It may make one or two import-export firms some money, but it's not going to help those 230,000 people who have lost their jobs, and neither will travelling to India, which is where a number our jobs have been outsourced already in the financial markets.

1740

Just to sum up, what do we need? We need action. Quite frankly, we need drastic action. We need a government that's a “do” government, not a government that's a “watch and wait and see” government. We've got a government over here that's “wait and see and do nothing.” On behalf of the 230,000, on behalf of all our children, our young people who are starting out, our seniors who are hoping for a comfortable retirement, I say, “You're going to have to wait and see, because this is not a government that's going to deliver for you.”

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Charles Sousa: I appreciate the opportunity to engage in this discussion as well. I'm hearing two ex-

treme points of view. One is a tax-and-spend strategy that they feel is best at this point in time during this economic downturn. The other is a slash-and-burn strategy. Frankly, what I see that we need now more than ever is a sober strategy that's sustainable over time, and that allows us to take advantage of the fact that we have a lower debt-to-GDP ratio than we've had in a long time.

I'm looking at a situation here where we want our government to be fiscally responsible and socially conscious: conscious about issues like poverty, and conscious about the need for us to maintain a strategy around innovation so that we can continue to invest, in incubating some of our businesses to succeed. Another one is around infrastructure. We have in this province the largest infrastructure build in its history. And it's about partnering with businesses, big and small.

The government, and Ontario—for that matter even Canada nationwide—has established, over time, strong foundations and strong fundamentals to enable us to weather this storm. I believe that Ontario is poised, better than ever, to weather this storm, because we've taken those proper precautions over time. I can go over the bill on a couple of items, but I want to talk about issues around helping seniors through the property tax credits, as well as granny flats enabling us to house those in need of accommodation. We've already spoken about enabling big and small businesses to take advantage of capital tax credits, and innovation tax credits are another big portion of this amended bill. With that, I'd say we should continue to support the strategy of this budget.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I'd just like to talk a little bit about the past five years under this government and the increase in our long-term debt by \$30 billion. The present government talks about building infrastructure—I heard the member from Peterborough talk about building their hospital. This government has held out to the public that they have paid for that Peterborough hospital when, in fact, they haven't. Effectively, what they've done is mortgage the Peterborough hospital. I guess my greatest concern over this government's mandate has been that they have collected massive revenues in surplus over the last four years of their five-year mandate, and in spite of that, they gave it all away. They spent it all. They gave \$1 million to a cricket club and called that an investment. I don't call that an investment. I call that a giveaway. I call that being spendthrift. I call that a waste of our money. Instead of paying for the Peterborough hospital, what they have done is borrow the money.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: We've built the hospital.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: You built the hospital, but you built on it our children and our grandchildren, and we're going to have to pay for that in the future.

What they have done is not taken the tremendous amount of money they had and invested in it the Peterborough hospital, in highways and in schools, which they should have done, so that now we wouldn't have the debt of that additional \$30 billion to pay the interest and carrying charges on as we go forward.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: I stand to comment on the statements made by my friend from Parkdale-High Park. As always, she was eloquent, and, as always, she pointed out, I think, where she sees the failings of this particular government. She zeroed in on three distinct avenues which I think are worthy of comment; that is, of seniors, of students and the debt load that they have, and of poverty in general.

In terms of the seniors, she quite rightly talked about the property tax and about the burden that is being placed on many seniors who have paid off their homes and who now find themselves with declining monies because of their pensions and, because monies are running out, are being forced into positions where they cannot pay the property tax.

She is quite right that what the government has put forward in its last budget was a pittance in comparison to what most of them are going to have to pay in taxes, particularly if those taxes rise by a large amount. The \$250 maximum that can be given to a senior is not too much if their properties escalate in value by a great amount. Today in the House I talked about two of them in Richmond Hill, one of whom is looking at \$7,000 in taxes this year, and the other of whom is looking at \$9,000 in taxes this year, both up substantially from last year. So \$250 will just not cut it. She is right to talk about that.

She is also right to talk about students in our society, the students who are going to lead this province in the future, the students upon whom we will rely to produce the goods and services and the economy of the future. The debt ratio of students in Ontario is the highest in all of Canada, and it's certainly not sustainable in the long term. She's right to ask the government to please try to do something about that.

Last, in terms of poverty, I can only reiterate what she had to say and echo my own frustration that we are moving far too slowly on this file.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I listened to the comments from the member for Parkdale-High Park. It's interesting. If she had been here earlier, she would have heard my address. I said that companies in Peterborough are developing new markets in India and China, two of the fastest-growing markets in the world, and it's incumbent upon us—I mean, everybody knows that if you're going to be successful in the global economy today, you have to find markets outside of our traditional market in the United States. This means going into places like India and China. GE, whose workers in Peterborough are proud members of the Canadian Auto Workers—their success right now and the reason they are on a massive recruiting campaign is that their generators and their motors are being sold in the Indian market and the Chinese market. GE Peterborough, the people in the marketing division there, are smart enough to know that you've got to diversify your market base and you go into the largest market segments in today's world, which are India and

China, Russia, and some parts of Europe. So if you're going to be successful down the road, you've got to exploit those markets.

It's interesting. My good friend from Carleton-Mississippi Mills, who has been a very distinguished member of this House since 1977, was around during the Davis years. Mr. Davis, one of Ontario's most distinguished Premiers, was Premier for 14 years and ran 14 straight large deficits. A lot of the borrowing that was done during the Davis years to invest in schools, universities and community colleges was debt that is now being paid for by a generation that I'm part of as we move along. So it's really interesting. You use history when it suits you most.

Indeed, the member for Essex provided me with some interesting statistics. In 29 years of Tory rule, during that period of time, they only had seven balanced budgets—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Thank you. We'll have to wait for another time.

The member for Parkdale-High Park for a response.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I listened with interest, first of all, to the discussion about deficits. It's interesting historically that, when you look at provincial deficits, the party that has run the most balanced budgets is the New Democratic Party; second, the Progressive Conservative Party; third, the Liberal Party, just so you know historically that's the case.

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Second of all, what is good for General Electric and the Big Three automakers, as has been proven by the McGuinty government, is not necessarily good for the worker on the line. Unless there are job guarantees—and if you're offshoring to China and India, there probably won't be—that's not necessarily the answer.

To my friend from Mississauga South, the help that the McGuinty government has given to seniors is a maximum of \$250, and you don't qualify if you're in arrears on your taxes. They're the people who need it most. For most seniors who've just received an MPAC assessment and will get their tax bill, \$250 is not going to make the difference between keeping and losing their house.

I also failed to mention—I just ran out of time—our member from Hamilton Centre and her wonderful work on child care. Quebec has \$7-a-day child care. We don't have anything. We have one in 10 children who even have a space, and those who do pay over \$1,000 a month.

Just to sum up, instead of a “do” government, which is what we need in tough economic times, a government that's going to step up and do something—this is a quote from someone we all know and love, Homer Simpson—we've got a “duh” government. That's what's sitting across the floor. Once this government moves from “duh” to “do,” maybe we'll see some help for seniors, maybe we'll see some help for the young people, maybe we'll see some help for those who live in poverty, maybe we'll see some help for us.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Colle: I'm not going to be as condescending as the last speaker because I don't have all the answers, and I don't think most members around here have all the answers. I think we have to start listening a bit more and not condemn all the time and not condescend all the time, because these are unprecedented times. The hackneyed attacks and the hackneyed descriptions—people aren't listening anymore. It's the same thing that's happening in the States. You've seen what the McCain-Palin people are doing. They're just doing what the member from Parkdale is doing: these senseless attacks, without listening to people.

What I've been hearing from people is that they want government to plan ahead to get us out of this very serious situation. We can point fingers at the neo-cons, we can point fingers at liberals and point fingers at the socialists—the public doesn't want the finger pointing. They want us to look at solutions and ways of getting us out of this because they are afraid. It doesn't matter whether you worked on Bay Street or whether you worked on Bloor Street in Toronto; people are afraid because they see the reality of what's happened. They know that people are unable to make the car payments. They're unable to perhaps even pay for the gas in the car because they're not even sure whether they're going to have a job the next day. That's what's happening in Ontario. To have this myopic look and say, “Well, it's all happening and it's all Ontario's fault. Aren't we awful here in Ontario. The government is awful”—people know better than that.

They know that their friends are calling them from Ireland, which is supposed to be the Celtic tiger, which was attracting people from all over the world by lowering taxes to the bottom. Ireland is almost bankrupt. They've had to increase their sales tax to 21%. Real estate prices have gone down by 30% in Ireland. Ireland was this great beacon for new capitalism: “Come to Ireland. Look what we're doing. We're lowering taxes.” In fact, I remember someone who worked here in Toronto who took off to Ireland. This was about a year ago. I wonder if he's going to come back.

I remember, back in the early 1990s, that the Conservatives were talking about the nirvana being New Zealand—“Go to New Zealand; they've got this incredible economy there”—then it collapsed. We hear the NDP talking about nirvana in Sweden. There's always some magic place.

Well, folks, we live in Ontario. It is a magic place here because, whether you want to look at government or you want to look at institutions, it's the people here. We've got people who are the hardest-working, entrepreneurial, risk takers, and they're also very kind people, here in Ontario. They help each other. That's why Ontario, I think, will get through this—not because of government but because of its people.

That's why it's amazing that of the speakers here this afternoon, not one of them mentioned the constant rip-off of Ontario workers. I don't hear the NDP ever mention that. If you lose your job in Ontario, you're never eligible

for EI. It is disgusting that that takes place. You can't get unemployment insurance in Hamilton. You can't get unemployment insurance in Chatham. You can't get unemployment insurance in Oshawa. It's almost impossible: 75% of our citizens don't get it, yet they pay into unemployment insurance. That's the kind of thing we have to fix if we are going to get through this very difficult time.

That's the kind of thing we can do as MPPs that gets us somewhere because it helps people. If we want to start to change things so we can get through, we have to make some of these things better for our ordinary people. That's one thing we should all be talking about every time we stand up, the EI rip-off that has been taking place.

Interjection: Who did it?

Mr. Mike Colle: Again, there goes the NDP: "Well, who did it?" I don't care who did it when. It's being done right now. It's the same—

Interjections.

Mr. Mike Colle: The NDP just proved my point again. Who did it? I told you, I don't care who did it. All I know is the workers want us to fix it and make it right. I'd rather spend my time fixing it than blaming someone for causing it. The Conservatives want to blame Paul Martin; the NDP want to blame—I don't know—Brian Mulroney. I don't care about Paul Martin or Brian Mulroney. I care about that Ontario worker in all of our ridings who can't get unemployment insurance when they have paid into it for years. Some of them have paid into it for 10 or 15 years, they can't get it, and we don't say anything here.

How can you stand up in this House to talk about poverty and not talk about unemployment insurance rip-offs? That's how they get into poverty: because when they can't get EI, they go onto welfare; because if you can't get EI, you can't get EI training programs—you're not eligible. They talk about poverty, they're going to do something about poverty, and they don't talk about that rip-off. How can the NDP, day after day, never talk about the EI rip-off, I want to know, if they are so concerned about poverty?

I don't mean to be critical; I'm trying to respond to the fact that we've got to look at fixing things rather than pointing fingers. Then—

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Colle: There he goes again. The Conservatives are worried about saying something bad about the federal government. God forbid we should say something about the federal government. He's worried about mentioning the federal government. Anyway, sorry that I mentioned—I didn't even mention Mr. Harper. Sorry I did that. I'm sorry I mentioned the federal government. I apologize.

I just want to say one other thing that's in this bill is that—the NDP talk about helping seniors. They don't talk about the fact that what this bill does is ensure there's a higher threshold for seniors who can get an Ontario property tax credit, which is up to \$600 per household if you're under the new threshold. On top of the \$600 that you might be eligible for, for the Ontario property tax credit, which the member doesn't know about, there's the Ontario property tax grant. The Ontario property tax credit has been in effect for four years, and you haven't known about that. A senior in Ontario can get up to \$600, if they're under the \$24,000 threshold, in a property tax credit. This year in the budget we added the Ontario property tax grant, which is \$250 above the \$600 and, when fully implemented, will be up to \$500. I know that doesn't seem to be much for the members opposite, but the \$600 plus the \$500 for a senior living in a small home is a help. That's all I'm saying.

I'm saying that there's more that should be done, and the property tax assessment system is something that we have to endure, but at least this government is trying. We don't have all the answers, but we're trying.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): It being 6 o'clock, the time for debate has expired.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I declare the House adjourned until tomorrow, Tuesday the 28th of October, at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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Deborah Deller

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Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 28 October 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 28 octobre 2008

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by an aboriginal prayer.

Prayers.

OPPOSITION DAY MOTION

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just like to inform the House that I've had the opportunity to review the revised opposition day motion that was placed by the loyal opposition and reviewed by all three parties, and I find it acceptable to proceed with.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET MEASURES AND INTERIM APPROPRIATION ACT, 2008 (NO. 2)

LOI DE 2008 SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES ET L'AFFECTATION ANTICIPÉE DE CRÉDITS (NO 2)

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 27, 2008, on the motion for second reading of Bill 114, An Act respecting Budget measures, interim appropriations and other matters, to amend the Ottawa Congress Centre Act and to enact the Ontario Capital Growth Corporation Act, 2008 / Projet de loi 114, Loi concernant les mesures budgétaires, l'affectation anticipée de crédits et d'autres questions, modifiant la Loi sur le Centre des congrès d'Ottawa et édictant la Loi de 2008 sur la Société ontarienne de financement de la croissance.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Colle: Yesterday, I was speaking and trying to explain one of the provisions in Bill 114, and that referred to the Ontario seniors' property tax credit. The property tax credit was instituted by the government three or four years ago, and it enables senior households to apply, when they file their income tax, for a credit from the Ontario government. The credit can go up to \$600 per household. That is not only for people who own their homes or have a mortgage but also renters, because they pay property tax indirectly. So what this bill does is it raises the threshold so more people can take advantage of it. I know that a lot of people who have small homes and apartments in my riding do apply for that every year. You can get up to \$600 off your property taxes. But they

have to include it in their tax returns; that's very important. What people sometimes confuse this with is that in last year's budget we included the property tax grant. The credit was already in place. The grant, which will be up to \$250 this year and then, when it matures, will be up to \$500 per household, also has a threshold—I think it's about \$40,000 per household—but it's a direct grant. That's one way we're trying to help seniors on fixed incomes in their homes because we certainly know that the living-at-home strategy wants seniors to stay in their homes. It's something they want desperately.

In this bill we are talking about the general context of the economy. When I was coming to work on the subway this morning, it was very crowded. I said to myself, "This is a good thing," because in the early 1990s—and some of you remember the recession we hit in the early 1990s—I was involved with the TTC at that time, I was chairman of the TTC, and our ridership was just collapsing almost on a weekly basis because people were losing their jobs. I remember a lot of people at that time were requesting that we lower the transit fares to try and get more riders on transit. I know that seems to be the right thing to do, but it's really not the right thing to do economically. People were not riding transit at that time because they didn't have a job to go to. If you don't have a job to go to, you also do less shopping and less discretionary spending. So we could have lowered the transit fare right to the very bottom and it still wouldn't have brought people onto the TTC because, again, if you do not have that job to go to and you don't have money, you're not going to ride the TTC. For that time in our history, the TTC ridership was almost lock-sync with what was happening in the recession. TTC ridership went down; the number of people applying for social assistance went up. It was almost on a weekly basis in the 1990s when this recession really impacted on people. It was very, very challenging for government—it was challenging for everybody—to try and get through this.

Now, why I use that example of TTC ridership, which, by the way, I recommend to everybody who wants to see what's happening in the economy—and the good thing is that ridership is staying steady; it doesn't mean that it will, but for the time being it seems to be doing quite well. It's a very good indicator of the economic health of the GTA. Why I mention that is because of a lesson to be learned in terms of the overall economy. We as a government have invested over a billion dollars in the forest industry because of their challenges, but the forest industry is still struggling because, as we know, Ontario's forest industry, like Ontario's auto industry, depends on foreign

markets; in other words, willing buyers, especially in the United States, who buy our lumber and lumber products to build their homes etc. But as you know, the American domestic economy is in very sad shape. Our best customer, the United States, who buys our lumber and buys our cars is unable to buy because they're not working. So no matter how low the price of lumber is, the Americans aren't buying. The same with cars: Over 80% of the cars we manufacture here in Ontario—in Oshawa, Windsor, Oakville—are bought by Americans. Look at the pickup trucks—the Ford F-150s, for instance. We made a living in Ontario selling those trucks to Americans. They are not buying these very good Canadian products. You can lower the price of those trucks, as they are; still our best customers are not buying the trucks. That example is why we in Ontario are not an island unto ourselves. And not to use that as an excuse, but it's a reality check.

0910

The best thing that could happen for Ontario's economy is for the American economy to get back to where it was. I know as much as we'd like to say, "We're Canada; we're a large nation of 32 million; Ontario has 13 million people," we cannot get out of this economic morass that we're in unless we have our neighbours see better times. As you know, the American situation has directly impacted on the whole world's economy. The United Kingdom is now in a recession. Prime Minister Brown announced yesterday a huge stimulus package to try to prime the pump in the UK economy. They're not immune. France, Italy, even the East European countries—Hungary had to have a bailout from the IMF; Ukraine just got \$16 billion from the IMF. None of us are an island, and that's the lesson that maybe we should appreciate if we are going to get out of this economic morass that we're about to go in.

We are dependent on each other, whether dependent on the United States, dependent on Europe or dependent on Asia. The Chinese, who have been doing very, very well exporting products all over the world—we all know about their success—are now suffering; they're having to lay off people. In many Chinese factories the wages are being cut in half—a 50% reduction in wages—because the Chinese are not able to sell their products to the Americans and to the Canadians. So whether you're in China, whether you're in Iceland, where essentially there's been a total collapse of their banking structure, or whether you're in Ukraine, all of us are impacted by this economic downturn.

We have to ensure that our federal government, and whatever we do from a provincial standpoint, works with the world economic community. In the long run, that's the way we'll get out of it. As a government, we'll try to do what we can to cushion the blow, to try to make strategic investments, but it would be foolhardy to say that what we do in Ontario alone is going to be the solution to all of this unprecedented impact.

Thomas Friedman wrote a book called *The World Is Flat*. Basically, the thesis of that book is that no matter where you are, you are in one global village where we

are all affecting each other. In this time of crisis, we really have to understand that more than ever. I know that the Wall Street collapse has been the collapse for financial markets all over the world. That means that Main Street is impacted. Main Streets are impacted in every country in the world. So we have to try to understand that we've got a global impasse here and we need global solutions and we have to look at solutions.

I know in this House, sometimes all of us are partisan and saying, "Well, the last government had a deficit," or "Ottawa is not doing this," and that is going to continue. But I think we also want to listen to the people of Ontario, who are telling us: "We want to hear from you what your solutions are. We want to see what strategies you have in place to recognize the economic realities." The economic reality has just begun to hit—just begun. We are a little slower in the impact here in Ontario, but we are seeing it marching right across the world. That's why we need to try to find solutions, whether it be investments in infrastructure, in the new green, low-carbon economy, in retraining, or looking at initiatives to encourage entrepreneurship. We have to look outside the proverbial box in this case.

We have to listen to people like Warren Buffett. Two years ago, everybody scoffed when he said that the financial mechanism in the US market—the derivatives; you've all heard about that being the cause of much of this. He said that the derivative scheme was like a latent hydrogen bomb waiting to explode. And they scoffed at him; this was about two years ago. The Hank Greenbergs of this world, Alan Greenspan, the head of the US Treasury, all of these people, scoffed at Warren Buffett when he said, "Don't go down this scheme of derivatives." But we all drank the Kool-Aid. We all thought, "Wow, the market is doing great in Toronto. The market is doing great in New York. Let's get those derivatives. Hedge funds, wow. We'll go that way." But, sadly, Warren Buffett was right.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to add comments on the debate on Bill 114, Budget Measures and Interim Appropriation Act, and the speech by the member from Eglinton—Lawrence. This budget bill, of course, is leading up to a planned \$500-million deficit for this year, and I say that this deficit is just something that's totally political. It is a warm-up act for this government so they can continue their out-of-control spending, warming up to bigger deficits next year, when TD Bank predicts some \$4-billion to \$5-billion deficit.

The member talked about the early 1990s. Well, I remember, leading up to the early 1990s, the last slowdown, we had a Liberal government in power at that time too, leading up to the last big recession. That was the David Peterson government, which enjoyed relatively good economic times, and what did they do? They spent every dime that they received. They greatly increased the civil service. When bad times hit they had no room to manoeuvre, no room to increase spending to deal with

the bad times. Now we have the same act being replayed again this year.

The David Peterson government increased spending by some 45%, and we see the same thing happening with this government. This government came into power, and the budget was \$68 billion; it's now \$96 billion, a \$28-billion increase in spending. This year, revenues have decreased very slightly, but the spending is increasing. They have done absolutely nothing to try to control their spending. In fact, they've made four-year commitments to a number of different groups, 12% pay increases, which are further tying the hands of the government.

I say that this \$500-million deficit is just the warm-up act to soften the general public to the fact that we're going to have much bigger deficits in years to come. This government is to blame for not controlling their spending whatsoever.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I want to come from a bit of a different perspective. I've got a lot of respect for the chief government whip. He and I have had to deal with things over the years and generally have a pretty good relationship. My criticism would be this: Ontario's been very fortunate over the last century in that we've been sort of in the centre of everything when it comes to the economy in North America. Our border to the United States and proximity to their market have played to our favour. Naturally, because of the seaway, the Great Lakes system and our natural geography, things came easy to us. We had the natural resources in order to supply our industry, we had abundant hydroelectric power etc., and because of that, things just happened for Ontario. Government didn't have to intervene too much, because the economy sort of sailed along on its own.

If I have one criticism, it's that maybe because it was too good for too long; governments, in this case the McGuinty government and others before it, did not do the things that we need to do in our economy in order to say, "All right, the economy is changing. We are not going to have a traditional economy as we've had in Ontario for the past century, that it's strictly a resource sector with a manufacturing sector, making automotive, steel etc." I'm not saying those industries are going to be lost, but what we've not done is we've really not thought about strategies about how we position our economy over the longer term. How do we encourage the private sector and entrepreneurs to look at what the new products are that we can be building? We saw that with RIM—obviously, I think that is a good example—but it did not happen because governments were there trying to spur that kind of development to happen as far as new technology and new markets; it happened sort of on its own.

The problem we have now is that we are not, as a provincial government or as a federal government, really putting in place what's necessary to encourage that type of innovation. I'll get an opportunity a little bit later to talk about that, but we shouldn't be thumping our chests too hard at this point because I think we're not out of the—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: It's my pleasure to respond to the comments made by my friend from Eglinton–Lawrence. One of the comments really struck me this morning when he stressed the need of building partnerships. We are living in an extremely globally-connected world. We're seeing the direct impact of that sort of globalization right now in our economy in Ontario and in Canada in terms of what is happening in the financial world, and I think what my friend was speaking about is how we need to build partnerships.

0920

One great example in this bill which I want to focus on quickly is outlined in schedule P of Bill 114 dealing with the Ottawa Congress Centre Act and changing the name of the Ottawa Congress Centre in my community of Ottawa Centre to the Ottawa Convention Centre Corp., and here is a great example of what partnership can accomplish. We've got three levels of government coming together—the federal government, the provincial government and the municipal government coming together—pooling their resources and making sure that we take Ottawa as a hub for tourism and conventions to a whole new next level.

I'm very proud that the McGuinty government has invested \$50 million in the Ottawa Congress Centre—and the name will be changed to the Ottawa Convention Centre—to make sure it's a bigger facility, it's a facility that can accommodate much bigger conventions in the nation's capital, can bring more tourists in. I want to salute the leadership of Jim Durrell, the former mayor of Ottawa and the chair of the board of Ottawa Congress Centre, and Pat Kelly, the president of the congress centre, for really building that coalition and for all the three levels of government coming together to ensure that Ottawa remains at the forefront of the tourism business in terms of attracting large conventions. This new convention centre is going to be truly an additional crown jewel in what Ottawa has to offer.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question and comment.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Just responding to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence, whom I have a great deal of respect for, I want to say that I don't think his government prepared very well for this period of time. In my 18 years, this has been the strangest year that I've ever encountered while sitting in the House. Back in June, everything's rosy. We're told, when we ask questions about the economy—and we have been doing that for three years, telling this government that the economy is going to sour, that the good times, perhaps, are gone—because we could see the trend in the US and in Europe. But this government was asleep as late as last June and July, throughout the summer, telling everyone, "Don't worry, be happy, the fundamentals are strong in the economy," and then all of a sudden we have this bill today, which I call the deficit budget bill.

It shows a half-billion-dollar deficit, which I think is clearly not correct from the get-go. We see on page 16 of

the economic statement that was delivered on Wednesday, October 22, that they have not found any of their year-end savings of a billion dollars that they were supposed to be finding over the last four years. It's still marked as a billion; in fact, it's gone up to \$1.1 billion because, in the economic statement, they said they'll try and find another \$104 million or \$100 million. So you really can't believe them. They have not set the fundamentals right.

They criticized Jim Flaherty when he tried to say, "You know, Ontario, you've got the highest corporate tax rate." Every other province—governments of all political stripes—has come to a common corporate tax rate. They are all consistently lower than Ontario. They wanted to go out and sell Canada without having to prejudice one area of the country or another. They didn't want to have to go out and say, "Oh, by the way, Ontario is the highest." But because McGuinty didn't think of the idea, or because he was being forced by the federal government to do it, he simply was stubborn and still is stubborn and will not reduce those business taxes so that the federal government can go out and sell Canada as one country.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. I return to the member for Eglinton—Lawrence, who has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Mike Colle: I appreciate the comments from the members from Parry Sound—Muskoka, Timmins—James Bay, Ottawa Centre and Simcoe—Grey. I appreciate the feedback.

Ireland lowered its corporate tax rate to the lowest in the whole western world, yet the first country to suffer the economic collapse was Ireland, so lowering taxes doesn't do it for everybody.

In terms of the economy, we've got to start to understand that there's never been a time like this if we are going to really deal with this seriously. Could you have believed 10 years ago if someone had said to you that the shares of Mattel, which makes toy trucks, are of higher value than a share of General Motors, so you can buy a Mattel share—I think it was trading for \$4.60 a share, and a General Motors share you can pick up for \$4.10. You know the old adage, "What's good for General Motors is good for the rest of the economy"? Well, General Motors has already gotten a huge bailout. They are now begging for another bailout from the US government.

Why I mention General Motors, and I refer to the point the member from James Bay made, is that we in Ontario have been linked to the auto industry, we have been linked to the forest industry, and we've tried to keep those industries going because so many people rely on those industries for jobs. Hopefully, those industries and other industries will now realize that the whole paradigm has shifted, so we can't continue to pretend that the world is the same as it's always been. That's why the critical thing is to do some very innovative thinking, to find out what are the new jobs, the new economies, where we are

going, and to be positioned to do that. You've got to invest in these new ideas, and we're starting to do that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'm happy to join in the debate on the Budget Measures and Interim Appropriation Act, 2008. For viewers at home, this is basically a bill to implement last week's economic statement, which announced the province was going back into a deficit situation. So for the purpose of this debate, I think it would be easier if I just called this the budget deficit bill.

This budget deficit bill was introduced in this House last Wednesday by the finance minister, and as I've said, it reveals a half-a-billion-dollar or a \$500-million deficit, which should be troubling news for any taxpayer watching this debate. And actually, as I pointed out in my short response to the member for Eglinton—Lawrence, I think the deficit is probably about \$1.6 billion as we speak, because you would think the government, on page 15 of the economic statement, would actually brag about some in-house savings that they made, this billion-dollar line that goes back to 2004-05. They show in each year absolutely no savings, and then they show the current economic outlook for fiscal 2008-09—they're going to try to find \$1.1 billion, because they announced in the economic statement they'd try and find another \$100 million. They haven't found the first billion, and if you can't find a billion over four years, how in the world are you going to find a half a billion over the next couple of years to get us back in the black and out of deficit? You've been able to do nothing since 2004-05, or you would have bragged about it.

Instead, you've increased the public service, and I'll talk about that in a minute. The settlements you've made with—God bless them—nurses and doctors and firemen and policemen and the broader public sector are pretty generous when you consider that 300,000 people have had a 100% cut in their pay. They don't have jobs, they've lost their jobs, and they have very little hope of training, which I'll talk briefly to in a few minutes.

With the very first settlement you made with the broader public sector, you signalled that 3% was the bottom line. You didn't start at zero going into negotiations, talking about health benefits and job benefits and stuff like that. You started at 3% and you pretty well ended at 3% each year for all of those hundreds of thousands of broader public servants. Well, that's fine. You wanted to buy off the teachers; we know that. You wanted to buy off physicians and the broader public sector, and you've certainly bought off the firemen. Great politics for you, but you were doing it at a time when we were standing on this side of the House taking heat from those groups, saying that you just can't afford to do that; you can't afford to be that generous.

I was in cabinet for eight years, fourth in the order of precedence in terms of cabinet ministers, so I had a pretty good eye on what was happening in the province. We were trying to take the province from in the red. Remember, when the PC government came in, in 1995, the

actual deficit, everyone agreed—it was signed off by the Auditor General—was \$11.6 billion a year from the NDP. That worked out to \$1 million an hour, every hour, every day of the week, every day of the year, 365 days a year—\$1 million more going out in government spending per hour than what was coming in in revenues. You could not sustain that. Now we're seeing that all over again. We're seeing the David Peterson years, the best economic years we'd seen in my lifetime up to that point—1985 to 1987—and then he called the snap election in 1987. But then from 1987 to 1990, he managed to rack up an enormous deficit. At the time, it was a record deficit—you know, the spend and tax. Also, taxes went up a record amount.

0930

I say to my honourable colleagues across the way: The member from Eglinton—Lawrence talked about how Ireland lowered taxes and now, look, they're having the same problems as the rest of the world in this economic turmoil that we're in. True, but Ireland also went from times of war and strife to great economic times that I didn't think I'd ever see in my lifetime, for quite a few years, for a decade, and were leading the world in many growth areas. Now they're suffering a bit, but they did the right thing at the time to lower taxes, as Mike Harris did the right thing at the time: lower taxes and create jobs.

We couldn't bring a policy to our cabinet, and you certainly couldn't bring a 3% boost for your interest groups to cabinet—well, you wouldn't even get in the door. Even the security guards knew enough not to let something like that in. Everything we did had to create jobs, and that's what we don't hear from this government. Everything Ireland did during that decade was to bring peace and create jobs and take people's minds off—what did they use to call it—“the worries”? Or the strife they were having, anyway. And it worked. Mike Harris—it worked. We cut taxes—business, corporate and individual taxes—by \$16 billion at the same time we were getting rid of a deficit.

It was tough, but you have to learn how to take tough decisions when you're in government. That's what you make the big bucks for. That's why you have the limousines, so you can actually sit there and think and not have to worry about using your cellphone and driving, or write your speech, like I do in opposition now, as I'm driving along the road. Mr. Bartolucci smiles because I know he had many, many tough years like that too. But you've got to take the tough decisions.

Now I think what you're going to see—you had good economic times for the first five years. I don't think you laid the groundwork properly. I think you should have kept public sector wages down; you should have kept public sector growth down. We've seen a tremendous growth in the public sector, and not just the broader public sector. You say, “Well, those numbers all include teachers and doctors and that.” Yeah, and we needed more teachers, and we certainly need more doctors. But I'm going to give you the numbers of the actual public

service here at Queen's Park. I took the Ministry of Health in 1995-97 from 11,000 bodies of actual public servants—not doctors, not nurses—down to about 6,800. And that was tough. I wasn't very popular—I see smiles across the way—but it had to be done. We had to get the size and cost of government down. You just haven't done that, and I think we're on the slippery slope again.

I think that, as my honourable colleague from Parry Sound-Muskoka said a few minutes ago, this half-billion-dollar deficit contained in the economic statement, the deficit budget bill here today, is really the warm-up act for what truly has to be an enormous deficit next year. Otherwise, I think you would have shown that—certainly, I know that my honourable colleague Mr. Phillips, minister without portfolio now, who was the critic of finance most of the time that we were in government, wouldn't want to be sitting in a cabinet that was preparing to have a huge, huge deficit next year. I think there's no other way out of it.

It's amazing how, through your ability to have the media on your side—we call the Toronto Star the Liberal briefing notes—that they're not freaking out. This would be four-inch headlines if suddenly in June everything is rosy, with a “Don't worry, be happy” Premier and finance minister, when the rest of the world is certainly showing signs, real signs of economic turmoil and where we on this side of the House, for three years, have been telling you that you can't keep going in the direction you're going; you're going to have to bite the bullet, even though it's against your ideology, or you think it was our idea first, or it's a Conservative idea. In the name of jobs, in the name of the almost 300,000 people who have lost their jobs, you're going to have to bite some of these bullets, and bite them right away in terms of lowering your taxes, so that Canada can go out and be sold across the provinces with some of the lowest business tax rates in the world.

Right now, Ontario—and you don't deny it and none of your economic advisers deny it—you have the highest start-up business taxes, new taxes, for a business in North America. So if there are jobs going to be created—and yes, the world won't end tomorrow, so jobs will be created and things will get corrected, and markets will come back.

The price of oil has already gone down. It's going to be interesting who they're going to blame next month, because the price of oil is below \$66 a barrel today, so that excuse is gone. The dollar is well below 80 cents—that excuse is gone. Gee, these were all your excuses for the last four years: the federal government doing this; the dollar was too high; a barrel of oil too high. “We have no control over our economy”—so why did anybody elect you? If you have no control over the economy, even to the degree that a province is expected to have control, but you don't even take that responsibility, then we're in trouble. So it will be interesting.

The federal government got blamed for everything on this side of the House, whether it was crime, lack of nursing home beds—I don't know how you blame the

federal government for that; they've increased health care transfers—or lack of doctors—we saw that in the federal campaign. They were blaming the federal government for the lack of doctors. I was health minister for two and a half years. You can't blame the federal government. We actually started to increase the supply of doctors even though Paul Martin cut \$2.2 billion. I had been health minister for two weeks. In my second week, he cut an actual \$2.2 billion. He didn't bother to call me or have his health minister call me; I got an e-mail saying, "Transfers." All the health ministers got on the phone one night and said, "Jeez." There were Liberals and the NDP and Conservatives on the phone in a conference call saying, "Jeez."

Do you know what? The Toronto Star did nothing, absolutely nothing—\$2.2 billion. Of course, they're here for one of my "nothing" speeches again, so that's the usual attendance I get from those people. But they said nothing. In every one of my letters—you would send me a letter about some medicine that went wrong and I would add this paragraph: "Well, you should know that the federal government cut \$2.2 billion"—and that was my only way, because we weren't doing government advertising; we cut \$10 million of government advertising, so I could not take ads out, like you guys do, saying that the federal government had cut us by X number of dollars—"and that's why I couldn't respond to your health care concerns as quickly as I wanted to." But that was another thing too on how times have changed.

I'm talking about this budget bill. We're now into times changing back to where they were, into deficits, which is a shame, because when you consider the—is it a \$173-billion debt we have? I'm way off my notes, but it's in about that area. There's \$9 billion paid in interest every year. When are we ever going to start to pay that off? That works out just in new debt alone, new spending alone—you know, it took a decade to get us back into the black under the Mike Harris government. It's taken them five short years to put us back into the red, into a deficit, which I think is \$1.6 billion. The budget, over the last five years since Dalton McGuinty has come into office, has gone from \$68 billion to \$96 billion. It took us 136 years since Confederation, I believe, for Ontario to finally get to a \$68-billion budget.

If you need proof that your spending was out of control, is out of control, this economic statement and these budget bill interim appropriations don't go anywhere near far enough to putting you on the right track. But if anyone wants proof—and you don't have to listen to Jim Wilson or Bob Runciman or John Tory—you can just look online at the economic statement itself: \$68 billion. It took us 136 years to get to that government spending level, and \$28 billion and five years later, we're at a \$96-billion budget. Just off the top of my head, that's about a 42% or 43% increase in five short years—remarkable, and remarkable that you weren't written up every day and brought to account for that. We try to do that in opposition. But it's remarkable that you can spend 40% more in such short years. It took 136 years to get to a

\$68-billion budget and then you add \$28 billion—and that's just government spending; that's core government spending. Advertising—I will go through the two-and-a-half-million dollar parties at Windsor Casino and all the boondoggles. Your actual other spending is about another \$30 billion of borrowed money.

You were completely against P3s. In fact, you had interest groups actively protesting out in front of the Brampton hospital while it was under construction under the Progressive Conservative government and any other sites across the province where we had done P3s, private-public partnerships, which means the government uses a little bit of their money to leverage private sector money, you drive the best interest rate you can with those companies and you get the project built, presumably on time, because you build in tough penalties with those companies to make sure they do it on time and on cost. The other way of doing it is basically a P3, but the other partners are the banks. The biggest borrower in the country, next to the federal government, is the Ontario government. So the other P3s, in the old way of doing things, were the banks.

We came along, along with the rest of the world, and said, "We're going to do P3s." My point there is, just like they said they wouldn't raise taxes—and Dalton McGuinty looked into our living rooms through the television in the 2003 campaign and again in the last campaign and said he wouldn't raise taxes. But he's doing that. He's subtly raising fees and taxes throughout the province in many of the services.

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Again, these P3s: There's another \$30 billion that is going to have to be paid off that you guys don't talk about. You brag about the construction, but you don't stand there and say, "By the way, we borrowed 95% of the cost of this new school," or, "We borrowed 80% of the cost of this new hospital." You won't even release the details of those contracts so that taxpayers can determine whether it's a good deal or not. So there's another \$30 billion in spending out there. They like to brag at the ribbon-cuttings at these buildings, but they forget to tell the taxpayers. They were totally against this sort of construction and borrowing in the past, and they're doing it rampantly now. All I say is: Fine; just be honest with the people of Ontario, release those contracts, and let us determine whether it was a good deal for taxpayers.

I did the largest privatization in Canadian history when I was Minister of Energy, and that was the privatization of the Bruce nuclear plant. It turned out to be a huge success. This government's bragging about it. They actually gave them a licence to bring up one of the downed reactors during their time, so they must have had great confidence.

I released that contract when I was asked. I released it several times. I remember that Mr. Hampton, the member for Kenora-Rainy River, used to say quite frequently, "Give me the contract," and I would have a poor page here carry over those six- or eight-inch, 24-inch binders of contract to give to him. I also gave it to him in committee a couple of times.

It was a successful privatization, because there was transparency. The employees were transferred from the former Ontario Hydro to Bruce nuclear. They were members of the Power Workers' Union, and they actually ended up being better off because Bruce nuclear believed in profit-sharing, which they had done in their plants in Scotland and England. It turned out to be a huge success. In fact, to this day, thank you very much, the Ontario Power Workers' Union is my best supporter when it comes to financial contributions in campaigns. Unions are supposed to be against Conservatives, but if you're transparent, you work with them and you do things right, they can become good friends.

Which brings me to, in the final few minutes I have, one of my pet peeves and one that many of my colleagues here share: something that you could do right away to increase jobs in Ontario. We have thousands and thousands—and we've brought many of them, on many occasions, down here to Queen's Park to sit in the galleries, while we ask the government the question, "Why won't you change the apprentice-to-journeymen ratio?" Today, if you want to apprentice in the electrical field, you need to join a shop that has at least three licensed electricians or journeymen. Now, most of the shops—about 80% in the province—are small, and they might have two journeymen, which means that they can never take on a new apprentice. So they can't train any of these thousands of kids, young people mostly, who are going through college today to become an electrician.

You can work at that shop during the summer, do the same work as an apprentice, for three or four months, but then when you actually have to go into the apprentice program to get your hours towards your ticket, you can't work for that shop anymore. Many of these shops are father-and-son shops, for example, and they can't necessarily afford to hire another journeyman—well, they can't find one because none are being trained. So, it's just this total Catch-22. It wasn't an issue brought to our attention very much at all when we were in government, so you can't blame us for not having done it five years ago. You've had five years. You've got apprentices. We brought them down here so you can stare them in the eyes.

It's all because you are in favour with the unions: Of the \$5 million that the unions contributed in campaign contributions to the Liberal government in the last election, last October—88% of them had a stake in this ratio business. So whether it was the electrical brotherhoods or boilermakers or machinists—there is a long list—they almost all, or through associations, gave money to the Liberals.

Why do the unions have an interest in not changing these ratios? For a mason, for example, it's 5-to-1. You've got have 5-to-1. Good luck, if you want to find five masons in any town in this province just to hire one new student, or apprentice. I say "student" just to make it simple for everyone. So you have almost no new masons being trained in this province, you have very few machinists being trained, and yet this is a regulatory change.

It doesn't require a new law. You simply go to the cabinet, you change it, and tomorrow all these young people who have worked in these shops during the summer can now start to get their hours together towards becoming full-time professionals in their trades.

Why do the unions not like it? Supply and demand. They like to keep it low. I just moved houses. I waited weeks for an electrician—and I'm the local MPP. Generally, I can pull strings; people generally like to come over to my house and help out. But try and find an electrician, carpenter—what was the other one I had the other day who I still haven't found? I've forgotten about it. And you're paying \$60 an hour, you know? It's crazy.

Those that have a nice job in a unionized shop, that are in—I can't say that word—cahoots with the Liberal government because of all the money the unions put into—they used to put it into the NDP, by the way, but they've given up on them; now they put it into the Liberals. This political and trade brotherhood is hurting jobs. You're doing the wrong thing. I think it's immoral that you would so blatantly have this gamesmanship going on.

We can see the money trail. We know the regulations, we see the young people that want jobs—thousands—and we see your stubbornness. We see that all you want to do is blame the federal government. Good luck. There's one federal government in Canada, and every other province has done better in economic growth and jobs than Ontario. You're dead last. On the track you're on, you're still going to be dead last, and you're going to have no one else to blame.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I know that the government is the party that we should be attacking as opposition parties, and I like to do that as best I can on a regular basis, but I do have a question for the member from Simcoe-Grey. The member says everything that the Conservatives did while they were in power was about creating jobs. As I remember, this is what they did: They reduced government because they say government is too big, so they cut jobs. Then they, by his own admission, cut about \$16 billion over an eight-year period. He didn't say that, but it was over an eight-year period. I thought it was \$14 billion. Imagine: They say \$16 billion; it's even bigger than I thought. So \$16 billion gone forever—just gone—which has to do with income tax cuts—and the highest-income people are the ones who benefited the most—and corporate tax cuts. So \$16 billion gone. They then sold Highway 407, gave it away for 99 years, and got about three billion bucks out of that deal.

By the end of their term, they had a \$5-billion deficit. Let's say, to be fair to them, it was \$4 billion. To be fair, let's say \$4 billion, not \$5 billion. My question to you is, how do you do that? In great economic times, you cut corporate taxes—and the Liberals are saying they did that too; they upped you a little more in that regard—and at the end of it you have a \$4-billion deficit. How do you do that in a good economy? If you were that great, you would think you wouldn't have a \$4-billion deficit. Other

people say it's \$5 billion, and I'll give you credit for \$4 billion. How do you do that in a good economy? You also had \$3 billion by selling Highway 407. Do you get the picture I'm drawing for you, member from Simcoe-Grey?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bruce Crozier: I will begin by saying what others have said here this morning: that I respect my honourable colleague the member for Simcoe-Grey, and I share good times and bad times with him, but he's simply misguided. That's all.

We'll answer one thing first. He talks about journeymen and apprentices. Sixty per cent of the firms in the province of Ontario have a 1-on-1 ratio of journeymen to apprentices. What we're really talking about is the other 40%, and I suppose that they are those larger firms.

I think the people of Ontario can recognize that what really happens in this place is that I stand up and say, "We did it better," and say, "It's your fault." The member for Simcoe-Grey blamed it on the previous government, the NDP; we blame it on the previous government, the Conservatives; and if ever we don't form the government in the not-too-distant future, I suspect that whoever does at that time will blame us. But we look to our history to get our advice. These folks across the way, in this case the member for Simcoe-Grey, were giving us financial advice. Well, I recall, in the early years that I was here, that Mike Harris, before he was in government, said that government was bankrupt. But what did he do? One of the first things he did was, yes, give a tax cut, but what enabled him to do that? He borrowed \$20 billion. So it seems to me that this didn't make sense, that this bankrupt government should go out and borrow \$20 billion to give a dividend to some of its corporate friends and high earners.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to add my comments to the remarks from the members for Simcoe-Grey, Trinity-Spadina, and the member for Essex as well. I wasn't in the House at that time, but I'm sure that what Premier Harris was probably referring to at the time was that they were bankrupt of ideas. It wasn't that they were bankrupt of money; it was more that they were bankrupt of ideas.

But anyway, I'd like to comment on the remarks from the member for Simcoe-Grey. He covered a number of those issues, where the spending went from \$68 billion to approximately \$96 billion, a cost of \$9 billion a year in interest; another way of putting it is \$1 million an hour in interest, \$25 million a day in interest.

The apprenticeship ratios: I think he covered that very well. That's something that in my office I hear about on a frequent basis from the people in Sarnia-Lambton, as well as, being the labour critic, from people in eastern Ontario and the rest of Ontario.

The other issue is this economic bill that we're talking about this morning, about the deficit. They promised that

there would be no tax increase, but there's another bill that's going to be introduced, I understand later today or tomorrow, and that's the WSIB bill, the labour bill, which will force a number of employers to pay WSIB premiums, which, from information we have from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, will essentially mean a \$10,000 increase to those businesses, which, in essence, would be a tax increase. So it isn't going to be a budget without tax increases. That's just one that we know of; I'll speak about those later.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? Seeing none, I'll return to the member for Simcoe-Grey, who has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'll just respond. Member for Trinity-Spadina, remember when we cut taxes by \$16 billion—you're right—over eight years? Revenues went up by \$16 billion. Just look at the facts. The best income for government is not direct taxation in terms of businesses and job-killing payroll taxes; it is a human being and the dignity of a job and income tax, because then you're not draining any of the social services. You're able to raise your family.

Mike Harris said privately—and I'll tell you this for the first time. We came into government and we were having a meeting about taxes, and if they weren't so high, we wouldn't have been able to lower them. But Mike sarcastically said to me privately one day, "Thank God they're so high; I can lower almost every one of them."

You have an opportunity, I say to the Liberal government, to lower some business taxes right now a little faster than you're planning to and to hit some of those taxes that you maybe weren't planning on hitting, but you're out of whack with the rest of North America in terms of tracking. The member for Eglinton-Lawrence, during his remarks today, talked about attracting new jobs and the new economy, and more power to you. Get out there, sell the province, find the new jobs, invest in skills, which you need to do more of and you need to do it properly. The Second Career program is a miserable failure, as you basically admitted last Friday.

Secondly, I say to the member for Essex, whom I respect very much, if 60% of the firms have a 1-to-1 ratio, let's deal with the 40% that don't, and they're not the large firms. The large firms keep most of these journeymen in-house. The Hondas of the world—don't ever talk to me about ratios, and they're in my riding. They're in-house, they're on the payroll and they want to keep the union out, they don't have a union, they want to keep their people happy; other shops just want to keep the union happy.

So let's deal with the mom-and-pop shops, the father-and-son shops. They're the ones that are lobbying us, of about 62 different trades that need these ratios adjusted. You shouldn't let the big boys push you over; you should favour the small ones. Eighty per cent of the jobs created in Ontario are by small businesses.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? I recognize the member for Trinity-Spadina.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm happy to have the opportunity to speak to the fall economic statement. I would begin from where the member for Simcoe-Grey left off, and that is to say that during the Conservative reign, when they cut by \$16 billion in eight years, the member from Simcoe-Grey says, "But that was compensated by the fact that our economy was growing at a great rate." It is true that the economy was growing at a fantastic rate, but they left a deficit. The reason they left a deficit is that cutting income taxes and corporate taxes along with the increased revenue did not match one with the other. Therefore, to compensate for revenues not coming into the economy with what they were cutting by way of income taxes and corporate taxes, they had to cut, and they cut everywhere. They did it with a great deal of love, it seems. They cut in education. They cut in the construction of housing; not one public housing unit was built under the Tories. There was no child care under the Tories. They decimated our elementary and secondary system. The post-secondary system started to crumble under the weight of lack of government support. That's why tuition fees began to increase in a dramatic way.

So it isn't so, by way of the arguments that the member from Simcoe-Grey makes, that by cutting taxes, our economy grows. There's really no sound economic argument to be made in that regard. It failed dramatically as a strategy, and all the Conservatives have to offer is more tax cuts to the corporate sector. It's simply not an economic strategy. It didn't work, and it doesn't work in this setting either. It didn't work then in the good economy; it's not going to work in a bad one. It's not going to work either way. In both instances, we are in trouble economically. Sadly, that is the only thing the Tories have to offer in this debate.

The Liberals, not to be outdone, by way of Premier McGuinty say, "We cut corporate taxes some more." He actually admits that. He says it proudly, as if somehow that is a sound economic strategy. If it failed under the Tories, why would it be working under the Liberals, to cut corporate taxes even more? You would think that cutting corporate taxes even more would be creating the jobs that would pull us out of this recession, and yet it's not working. Right, Jeff, member from Peterborough? Because you've got a couple of degrees. It's not working, right?

Mr. Jeff Leal: Just continue.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: It is a problemo, I say to you. So we have to look beyond some of these tired propositions that political parties make.

The Liberals themselves, again not to be outdone and not to be outflanked by the Tories, keep cutting, only to discover in the end that they are short of money. That's why they had to break their promise not to tax. Thus, they introduced the health tax, which we attacked because it was an unfair tax on the middle class in particular, and the upper-middle classes escape unscathed, because if you earn over \$100,000, all you pay is \$900; if you earn \$200,000, all you pay is \$900; if you earned a million dollars, you pay 900 bucks. You understand what

I'm saying. If you are earning \$35,000 or \$40,000, you've got to pay your minimum, right? In the middle, \$40,000 or \$50,000, you've got to pay about \$600. You see how the middle class gets whacked by your Liberal proposal, member from Peterborough? It's obvious, right? It doesn't take a lot of intellect to understand that the middle class gets whacked by you fine Liberals.

Now, I understand you need money. You cut corporate taxes, yet you need money. Then you introduced the health tax. You had to break a promise. You had to, because you needed money, even in a good economy. You faced the same bright economic prospects that the Tories did for the last four or five years—the same economic prospects. You've had more revenues coming into your coffers, but you had to introduce the health tax because you needed money. You understand you needed money because the Tories took out \$16 billion. With your health tax, the unfair health tax on the middle class, you add \$2.5 billion to your coffers, and it's not enough. That's why you can't deal with a poverty agenda, even though you claim you are. That's why you built so little public housing, even though you claim you are; that's why you're doing so little by way of child care, even though you claim you're doing it, even though you never spent the \$300 million that you promised to spend on child care. Do you get the picture?

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Now you're in a crunch. The economy has slowed down completely. We've lost 230,000 manufacturing jobs. There are about 40,000 jobs that have been lost in related forestry industry jobs—and this is huge for a lot of places in the north, in southwestern Ontario, and many other parts of Ontario as well. So about 230,000 manufacturing jobs have disappeared, and it's continuing in the other sectors of finance and construction and retail, and it's not abating one single bit; it continues and it's going to affect us in a serious way.

So the question is, when we have good economic times, what do we do? Not only are we going to judge you by what you do in bad economic times, but we have to judge you in good economic times. In good economic times, what have you done that can make you proud? You should have prepared the ground, given that the fundamentals were great, as you claimed, as Harper claims. He still claims the fundamentals are good. As Rome burns, he still claims the fundamentals are good, but so did the Liberals. The Liberals, provincially, say the fundamentals are sound. Only of late are the Liberals saying, "It's a bit shaky. Things are getting tough. We've got to prepare ourselves for the worst" and so on. The point is, what did we do in a good economy?

Instead of raising the money that we desperately need in order to deal with income inequality that has now grown worse—and I don't know what Liberals are doing about this; I don't know what Tories are doing about this, except cutting more taxes—we have growing income inequality between the various social categories. The middle class is disappearing because middle-class jobs, largely unionized, are disappearing, and as those jobs

disappear and have headed off to China and India to a great extent, you're left with a class divided: high-income people and low-income people. That is why an economic report revealed just a week or two ago that income inequality has grown. That, in my view, ought to worry a whole lot of left-leaning Liberals, because I know there are some. I know that the social Conservatives also feel a bit uneasy about that and the social lefty Liberals feel a bit uneasy about that. But the question is, what are they doing about it?

Hon. Jim Watson: What about the right-wing New Democrats?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I know, Jim, you used to have an affinity to the other group a long time ago, so you fit quite nicely in the Liberal Party. I understand that. People can move between the Liberal and Conservative parties, no problemo. People have done that—

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: —and even Bob Rae has joined the Liberal ranks. So it's possible. Other friends up there, who don't want to be named—from Oakville used to be a New Democrat. God bless them. There are some.

Hon. Jim Watson: They're fleeing you, Rosie.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: No, most New Democrats stay firmly here, seated, with principles, on this side of the House, unlike our opportunistic Conservative and Liberal friends who flock to the Liberal Party.

In my view, this income inequality needs to be dealt with, because unless we do, we're going to have social wars 15 or 20 years from now. We're likely to be facing that again. We thought it was a thing of the past, but it's not going to be a thing of the past; it's going to be something we're all going to have to face. As people grow poorer and poorer, they're going to mobilize in ways that we're not going to like in the next 10, 15, 20 years.

So, my humble view is, and not a lot of people like to talk about it but we've done that in several elections, and that is to say we need to tax those people who have the money. Tories don't like that. You see it in America. The Republican candidate says, "Obama is going to tax you and he's going to redistribute your wealth, and it's just not right." It's a laughable kind of claim. He's going to take money from those who earn over \$250,000, and McCain is saying, "It's not good. He's going to take your money up there"—because only 5% earn over \$250,000—"and he's going to redistribute that money, and it's just not healthy." Not healthy for whom?

And so if you are in society, you have to be part of society, and if you're part of society, assuming you're a human being of one sort or another, then you've got to relate to others, you've got to work with others, and sometimes you've got to share the wealth and spread it around, because that's what it means to be a being in the world. If you're not a being in the world, you're somewhere else.

So my view is, we've got to raise some money. We should be taxing, beginning with MPPs who earn over \$100,000—we should be taxed a little more so that we can make a contribution to those who are less fortunate.

Now, Liberals are saying, including Monsieur Dion—God bless Monsieur Dion; nice man—even he says, governments need to intervene. And that was a laughable claim. Liberals are saying, "We need to intervene. We need government involvement." He almost said, "There are government obligations," although he didn't quite say that. But it's as if he's saying the government has an obligation to help those who are more deserving because they find themselves less fortunate in these kinds of economic circumstances.

Governments need to intervene. Governments need to redistribute wealth so that we are all, as human beings in this society, sharing in the wealth that we produce. And so I say that I want to be taxed a little more, because I believe that we can be taxed a little more than those who earn \$40,000, \$50,000, \$60,000 and even, yes, \$70,000. If we have a little more to give, we should be contributing a little more.

Where does that start? It starts from governments, so governments should be taxing a little more, but you've got McGuinty saying he's not going to increase taxes. Oh, no. He doesn't want to be worried about the Tories attacking the Liberals for raising income taxes, and at the same time they say, "But we need government intervention." What kind of government intervention is this when we're not building public housing to address the needs; when we've barely touched the child care problems that we're facing in this society, where women want to work and have to work, and they have nowhere to bring their children and find themselves in a crisis, yet we're not building child care spaces to provide for those working families, men and women?

We now have a situation where tuition fees are the second-highest in the country, and we have the highest debt levels in the country, and Liberals seem to believe that's okay. Well, it's not okay. It is not okay.

In the next year, as our economy gets worse, you will find government, this particular government—yes, even Liberals—cutting in our social sector, which includes education—elementary, secondary and post-secondary; child care; housing; infrastructure. Whatever you can think of, they're going to be cutting—yes, including health. That's what we're facing. These are our prospects. This is where we're heading.

So when you look at the fall economic statement for guidance, what does it give us?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Nothing.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: It give us absolutely little to work on, except a five-point plan that they've been working on for quite some time that is clearly failing the people of Ontario. And why is it failing? Because, clearly, you've got people who are being laid off by the day. Two hundred and thirty thousand manufacturing jobs have disappeared; 40,000 forestry-related jobs have disappeared; the retail sector is tumbling; the construction sector is stopping building. We've got people worried about their pensions, people worried these days about whether or not they'll be able to pay their mortgages—and that will be coming, I suspect, in the next

year—and the five-point plan that they tout, that they say is working to help Ontarians out, is failing us.

There were no new ideas put out by this government. The Second Career apprenticeship program is failing us. It was supposed to spend \$350 million over three years, and out of the 20,000 spots that it was supposed to have created, it evidently attracted only 1,000 applicants. Out of the 20,000 spots that it was supposed to have created, it evidently attracted only 1,000 applicants that were successful. It's not working. And the reason that it's not working, in my view, is that the government doesn't want to spend the \$350 million or \$359 million they said they were going to spend. They don't want to spend the money. If you don't want to spend the money, you create barriers. You make it difficult for those applying to actually get into this so-called second career.

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So I proposed, in an interview I did last week, that we look at the Jobs Ontario plan that we had introduced in 1992-93. The Jobs Ontario plan was a good one. People still talk about it to this day, except Liberals and Tories. But it allowed, or it gave, employees 30% of their salary. That helped the employer, with that 30% of their salary, to hire employees. It gave an incentive to employees to look for work and it gave an incentive to employers to be looking for employees. It was a good plan; it's still a good idea. They're doing things like that in Britain.

I propose that we force or oblige corporations that earn over \$1 million to contribute 1% of their money to a training fund. We believe that kind of training fund is a better plan. It's enduring, it's sustainable, it's predictable, and it trains on a regular basis to match the needs of the corporate sector that is saying, "We are short of skilled workers in many of our sectors." So what you need is a universal plan that's not one year, two years or three years, but that is long, sustaining and predictable. Not one Liberal supported that plan—not one. Some who might have liked the idea stayed out of the vote, but most of the other Liberals who were present voted against it. There are no new ideas being presented by this government to help those most in need.

We proposed a number of things. We proposed a Buy Ontario policy that would ensure that streetcars, subways, buses continue to be made right here in Ontario, resulting in the protection of thousands of good-paying jobs. They're doing it in America. They're doing it in Europe. We could do it here and should be doing it here. We proposed a five-year guarantee of industrial hydro rates so that Ontario manufacturing and resource companies can count on stable, competitive hydro policies at a time when many competing jurisdictions have far lower industrial rates. We've been pushing that for four years, and not one Liberal has been listening to that suggestion. We could have saved a whole lot of jobs in the north had we done that, had we listened to the leader of the third party in that respect.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Bartolucci is listening.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Bartolucci is listening, but he didn't listen to the idea: We proposed a jobs protection

commissioner to help at-risk companies overcome financial difficulties and save jobs, tougher plant closure legislation that would ensure that everything is done to prevent a profitable plant or mill from closing and enhanced mandated severance; expansion of severance eligibility and an increase of advance notice in mass layoff situations; pension and wage protection that would make sure that workers get every penny they are owed from their employer when their company becomes insolvent or goes into bankruptcy; and finally, a refundable manufacturing and resource investment tax credit.

We're saying as well that, as poverty deepens, we need to address that. The government says, "We've got a plan," and they didn't work on it when they had a great economy. Now this plan is about to be unfolded by December, and Santa Claus is going to come and announce something by December. Not last year, when the economy was still good and they seemed to have a plan. They wait until the economy crumbles to then say, "We've got a long-term plan, but you've got to limit your expectations, because what can you do?" And that was part of the Liberal plan as well: Wait for the economy to crumble and then say, "We're going to do the plan. It will be five years or it will be 10 years, and here are few crumbs for Christmas, and then we'll see what we can give you next year if the economy improves."

We need more from an economic statement than what you gave us. People are watching, people are listening, people are hurting and we're going to try to make you as accountable as we can to the middle class and to those most in need in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being 10:15, I'm compelled to now recess the House. This House stands in recess until 10:30 later on this morning.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm delighted to be able to introduce the family of our page Elise Wagner, who is from Guelph. Her mom, Johanna Wagner; her dad, Glenn Wagner; and her sister, Kaitlin Wagner, are all visiting with us today.

Hon. Jim Watson: I'm pleased to recognize, in the members' east gallery, Dennis Matthews and Paul Bien, graduates from my alma mater, Carleton University, one of the great institutions in our province.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would like to welcome, on behalf of the member from Halton and page Adriane Pong, her mother, Sandra, and her father, Josiah. Welcome to Queen's Park today.

On behalf of the Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services and page Emma Street, her father, Paul Street. Welcome to Queen's Park today.

I would also like to welcome some guests of mine today in the Speaker's gallery: Kory Preston, a former summer student in my constituency office, Kyle Hocking and Greg Evans. Gentlemen, welcome to Queen's Park.

ORAL QUESTIONS

VIOLENT CRIME

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Attorney General. On a regular basis, you refuse to answer questions in the House, suggesting that to do so would jeopardize the rights of accused. So I would like to ask you a question about a past court process, and it's dealing with the alleged shooter in the murder of Bailey Zaveda in downtown Toronto this past weekend, a Mr. Kyle Weese.

We now know from press reports that he was charged in a 2005 shooting, and the crown in a plea-bargain deal dropped six of the seven charges against Mr. Weese. Will the Attorney General reveal today what charges against this very violent man were dropped and explain why they were dropped?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I know I have some time to address this. As we express our sympathy, not only in this Legislature but in the community, for the families affected by these tragedies, we all naturally want to know what more we can do to protect public safety.

We knew several years ago we needed more police on the streets, so we have put more police on the streets, 1,000 more, and most recently 329 additional ones just the other day.

We knew that the laws relating particularly to gun crimes were not tough enough, so we pushed for the federal government to bring in reverse-onus bail for serious gun crimes and mandatory minimums for serious gun crimes. We know there's more to do there.

Our commitment throughout is to make sure that public safety is protected and respected at all times.

I'll speak to my colleague's question—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Hopefully, the minister will address the specifics of the question I posed.

I think, Minister, a convincing argument can be made that because your crown, the office that you're responsible for, dropped six of seven charges against Mr. Weese, he was on the street this past weekend, allegedly shooting six people and killing one, Bailey Zaveda, because of decisions made by the crown.

You are the chief legal officer for this province, responsible for enforcing the Criminal Code to protect Ontarians, and people deserve an answer. Bailey's family deserves an answer.

Why did your officials do a plea-bargain deal with someone the police describe as a very violent person with an extensive criminal record? Why did this happen?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The crown has always taken public safety as the paramount consideration, and we protect the public safety within the facts that can be proven and with the law that applies. It may or may not be the result, in all cases, that somebody who doesn't know all the facts and the law might think is appropriate.

Whenever a case is resolved by way of trial or by way of guilty plea as a result of discussions, there may be multiple charges. At the end of the day, the crown makes sure that public safety is paramount, remembering what facts we can prove and what law applies.

We have pushed for tougher laws to give our justice system the tools they require and we will continue to do that, both in terms of the sentences and the bail provisions that apply and the release provisions that apply after parole. We will protect the public—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Bailey Zaveda's family deserves specifics, not generalities. The province is responsible for the administration of justice, and this minister, day after day, blames others and accepts no responsibility for a system that he's in charge of. If the system worked properly, Mr. Weese would have faced all seven charges. If the system worked properly, the crown would have opposed the two-for-one credits Weese got at sentencing. If the system worked properly, Bailey Zaveda, in all likelihood, would still be with us today.

Minister, are you satisfied with the performance of the justice system in this case, and if not, will you accept any degree of responsibility for its failure?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: All families are affected by this tragedy, and we're all affected in our individual families, because we all have our loved ones and our friends and our neighbours whom we all want protected.

I agree with my friend entirely when he calls for an end to the two-for-one credits—entirely. We have been advocating for that as a province for years. We have been advocating for a statutory end to two-for-one credits and will continue to do so. We've been pushing for tougher laws both at bail and sentencing. We've had some success, and credit to the federal government where they've done that. There's more to do. People are asking what more can be done. I am speaking with Chief Blair and other chiefs about specific changes to the bail laws for the dangerous, the violent and the out-of-control that will further protect our communities. I look forward to my friend's suggestions—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question?

VIOLENT CRIME

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Back to the Attorney General again. Later today, we'll be debating a motion calling for a public inquiry into the bail system in Ontario. The Attorney General is responsible for what has become a revolving-door justice system in this province. People are arrested for violent crimes, gun crimes, and all too frequently, in the blink of an eye, they're back out on the street, committing additional crimes. Just this morning, we read reports of police searching for a shooter who was out on bail for an armed robbery charge.

Minister, will you stand in your place today and tell us that you are not happy with the bail system the way it's

working in this province and that you and your colleagues will support the motion that's coming forward this afternoon?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Chief Blair was asked whether a public inquiry was required and he said, "No. We know what a number of the issues are. So now"—and I'm paraphrasing—"let's get to the solutions."

The question is, in the case of the dangerous, violent and out of control, are there changes that could be made in the bail system, for example? Because there are many layers here that will further protect public safety. We've advocated for and were successful in reverse-onus bail for serious gun crimes. We've advocated for—not yet successfully—in getting the federal government to change young offender laws for the out-of-control. What further protections are there at the bail stage or the trial or sentencing stage or at the parole-release stage to make sure that the dangerous, the violent and the out-of-control are not menacing the public? I look forward to the debate and the suggestions that come.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I guess that's a no, in terms of support for a public inquiry into the bail system in the province of Ontario. The minister continues, day after day, to blame others and suggest that he's doing everything right. But we know, if we just open the morning papers, that he is not doing anything right. He has the tools available to him, through his ministry, to appeal. He said in this House last week, in terms of the individual charged with that double murder, that his officials opposed bail. I've read the transcript. They did not oppose bail. He doesn't even take a cursory look at these situations, yet he gets up in this House and, day after day, gives these large pronouncements about, "We're doing everything right." You're not doing anything right.

1040

Minister, will you stand up on your feet and accept some degree of responsibility for this revolving-door justice system you're in charge of?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I understand the passion, because we're all passionately determined to make sure that the public safety is protected. And wherever we can make improvements within the issues within our control, we will do that, and look for more. More police on the streets was an improvement we knew we could make, and have done it. What's next? A guns-and-gangs task force, because we can be more strategic about how we deploy police officers—we can do that and are doing that. A crown policy manual, which always says that public safety is paramount—and we will continue to take that position. Tougher bail laws—we've advocated for that.

Is there more that can be done? I suspect that there is more that can be done. We've advocated for some more; maybe there's more still. I return to the all too common denominator here: a national ban on handguns to reduce the risk by reducing the number of guns in circulation.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Again, he's blaming someone else and not taking any degree of responsibility. He said earlier here that public safety is the overriding priority. I think it is not. It's somewhere far down the list. What we're seeing, in terms of decisions made by the courts, the crowns, the JPs and others involved in the system, is trying to achieve some kinds of cost efficiencies and cost savings. Public safety is not the overriding consideration when making release decisions. That's clearly the case.

The minister, through his crown law office, has options available to him. They can appeal all of these bail release decisions that involve violent crime and gun crime. They can appeal them in Superior Court; they're not doing that. They can apply for dangerous offender status; they're not doing that. They can apply under Criminal Code section 810.2, to have electronic monitoring; they're not doing that. There are all kinds of tools available to this government, but this minister and his people are not following through and not utilizing them. Why doesn't—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: On the latter point, I believe the last five years will show that we brought more dangerous offender or long-term offender applications than ever before in this province, and we'll continue to do so to keep the most dangerous out of the community. We must always, whether we take a position to oppose bail, whether we take a position at a trial or a sentencing, abide by the law that exists, which is why I say to my friend, let's work together and work with the federal government to make sure that where the law needs to be changed, it can be changed. We deal with different governments with different jurisdictions, but we all must share the same goal. The people want to be protected in their community. We have taken steps within our jurisdiction so far. We'll continue to do so and continue to work with the federal government. Indeed, I'll be calling them when the new ministers of justice are appointed to see what else we can do with the law—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Acting Premier. We know Ontario has lost over 230,000 good jobs and is losing thousands of good manufacturing jobs virtually every week. It was incredible in that context that the McGuinty government's economic statement last week hardly mentioned the issue of job loss and certainly had no strategy to deal with job loss. Today, we learn that the auto parts sector is in grave danger of losing thousands of more jobs and needs short-term financing because it can't get loans from the banks, due to their liquidity problems.

My question is this: At a time when we've lost thousands of good jobs, and obviously 72,000 auto parts

sector jobs are at risk, why has the McGuinty government no strategy? Why did the economic statement not—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Deputy Premier?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Economic Development.

Hon. Michael Bryant: With respect to the request for a loan, as the finance minister said, the government is open to working with the federal government and with our auto industry to deal with the liquidity challenges that are facing that industry right now, as we speak. I spoke yesterday with leaders in the manufacturing industry, the Ontario Economic Council, including the auto industry, to discuss our strategy. The strategy is the Ontario automobile strategy that invested dollars directly in the establishment of a burgeoning, growing—we at the time sought to improve productivity by making investments in the auto industry in exchange for the companies themselves making those investments.

The additional strategies, I'm happy—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I don't think the minister's answer would give many Ontarians much confidence. What Ontarians have seen is that the McGuinty government gave General Motors \$175 million and then thousands of GM workers were given pink slips by GM. The McGuinty government gave \$100 million to Ford before Ford sent thousands of workers out the door with layoff slips.

My question is this: Since there was no jobs strategy in the economic statement, and since the McGuinty government's auto sector strategy is full of the holes I've just mentioned, can the McGuinty government assure us that the auto parts sector will get meaningful help from the McGuinty government, and in return the McGuinty government will demand job guarantees?

Hon. Michael Bryant: The government has provided support to the auto industry as part of its strategy by making a half-billion-dollar investment in that industry. That created jobs across this province, jobs that I know this member would support. I understand that the member takes issue, but I would hope he would stand up and say that the auto strategy was a solid strategy.

Secondly, the advanced manufacturing loan strategy allows for companies to come forward—and auto parts companies have come forward—to individually apply for loans. Ninety million dollars has been spent through the advanced manufacturing fund in that regard. In addition, there's the Next Generation of Jobs Fund, which I will speak about in the supplementary.

But to answer the member's question, the government has said it is open to working with the federal government, as governments in other jurisdictions are doing, to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The McGuinty government says that its strategy in the auto sector has been a success.

I invite the minister to go to Windsor and talk to all of the laid-off auto workers there, or go to Chatham or go to St. Thomas and talk to all the laid-off or soon-to-be laid-off auto workers there, or go to Oshawa and talk to all of the laid-off auto workers there. It's obvious when you talk to those laid-off auto workers that the strategy they have seen so far is not working.

What I'm seeking from the McGuinty government is a commitment today that it will not be the same old, same old, which obviously hasn't been working, unless you count workers going out the door on layoff a success. Will the McGuinty government commit to providing short-term loan financing to the auto parts sector in exchange for job guarantees? Yes or no?

Hon. Michael Bryant: This government established a program well before it hit the front pages of the newspaper, I say to the leader of the third party, and well before this letter was received by the finance minister, in order to be there to provide loans to the advanced manufacturing industry, to provide assistance to the auto parts industry, just exactly for some of the reasons that the member has said. Moreover, this was in advance of the credit crunch. This was established far before the recent events which have led to the loan request in particular. So I say to the member that this government anticipated the need for upgrades and assistance with loans and investments in this industry, and that is on top of the half-billion-dollar investment in the auto industry. This government has made huge investments and has made a massive commitment to the auto industry, and I can assure the member that it will—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question.

1050

SKILLS TRAINING

Mr. Howard Hampton: Again to the Acting Premier: We learned yesterday that the McGuinty government, in one month, spent \$4 million in advertising on its Second Career program, and yet only 1,300 laid-off workers have been able to gain access to the Second Career training program. That works out to \$3,100 in advertising per unemployed worker who has been granted access to the program, and that \$4 million was just the advertising bill for the month of July.

I want to ask the Acting Premier: Can you tell us, how much money in total has the McGuinty government spent advertising a second-careers program that has so far only signed up 1,300 laid-off workers for training?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. John Milloy: Again, I want to begin by clarifying for the member that I know he would never want to leave the impression that Second Career is the only program that's available for laid-off workers.

I'll give him some figures that he'll want to remember. First of all, Employment Ontario, which is the main body which deals with those in Ontario looking for jobs, serves

about 900,000 people every year. In terms of laid-off workers, we have a system of action centres across the province which, in one year alone, dealt with about 53,000 individuals. We have a number of programs that are available for people looking for a job, including short-term training. We've seen about 13,000 people come forward.

But the one gap that we acknowledge is that there was no long-term training. So in June of this year, we brought forward the Second Career strategy and, yes, we brought forward an advertising campaign to make sure that people knew about this new strategy—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: Speaker, you have to help me out. It was a simple question. I simply want to know: How much money has the McGuinty government spent advertising a second-careers training program that has only succeeded in getting training for 1,300 laid-off workers? I don't think that's too difficult.

But I want the minister to know about Jeremy in Hamilton, a welder who lost his job a year ago. Jeremy started attending Second Career meetings last spring, hoping that he could learn another trade. He was told, however, that because he already had a first career as a welder, the Second Career program would not pay for him to get a second career. After filling out many forms and going to countless meetings, Jeremy was rejected because he didn't have enough employers saying they wouldn't hire him as a welder. That's his experience.

I want to know: How much money has the McGuinty government spent advertising such—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. John Milloy: As I said, the Second Career program is a new program; it was introduced in June. I would like to inform the member that we've spent approximately \$4 million on print, radio, TV and online ads informing Ontarians of Second Career. We've also worked with Service Canada to send information on Second Career with EI cheques. Since launching the advertising campaign, we've seen results: almost 7,000 people a day visiting the website. Approximately 22,000 people have called the Employment Ontario hotline, and we've had about 6,000 people come forward for various EO training programs through that—Employment Ontario training programs.

The honourable member asked about criteria. He should be aware that last Friday, we announced changes to the criteria to remove obstacles for workers across the province and allow them more access to this long-term training program, which, combined with short training programs and a whole menu of services, serves about 900,000 people every year.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Speaker, you have to help me out here. I'm not sure if the minister can't add or if the minister is deliberately trying to avoid answering the question.

The Second Career program has been around for seven months. We know that the McGuinty government spent \$4 million advertising it in one month, the month of July alone. My question is: In total, how much money has the McGuinty government spent on a second-careers program that has only found training for 1,300 out of 230,000 laid-off workers?

It would seem to most workers that this program is all about giving the appearance that the McGuinty government cares about laid-off workers, through all kinds of advertising, but in fact doesn't help laid-off workers.

I ask again: How much money has the McGuinty government spent advertising this program that obviously—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. John Milloy: I think the honourable member needs to get his facts straight. Second Career was introduced on June 1. We began the advertising campaign in July. To date, we have spent approximately \$4 million to advertise a brand new program, unique in its kind across the country.

But this is more than about figures; this is about individuals. Let me tell the honourable member about some more individuals. Let me tell him about Andrew Machan. Andrew lost his job last spring following the first round of layoffs at Sterling Truck in St. Thomas. He heard about Second Career through the action centre that was set up at the plant. Andrew is now registered at Fanshawe College's engineering technician-industrial controls program.

I'd like to read a quote from Andrew. Andrew said: "Second Career has given me another chance to do what I've always wanted to do. Being in school and doing well at it has given me a more positive outlook about my future prospects. Next to marrying my wife, this is one of the best decisions I've"—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

VIOLENT CRIME

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Back to the Attorney General. I'm looking for answers to questions which he failed to respond to with specifics earlier, dealing with the prior charges against the man who is now accused of Bailey Zaveda's murder and the shooting of five other people on the weekend. Apparently, back in 2005, he was charged with—among other things—assault with a handgun and aggravated assault. He ended up pleading guilty to discharging a firearm with intent to wound. All of the other charges were dropped.

Again, the minister has had adequate time. Given the gravity of the situation on the weekend, surely he can tell us, tell the family: What were those charges that were dropped and why were they dropped? Why did the crown plea bargain with this man?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: You know, I have a 23-year-old. I can't imagine what any family goes through when they lose their loved one. We all share the deter-

mination to make sure we're doing everything we can so that we can protect the public safety.

The resolution of charges, whether through trial or plea, depends on the evidence and the law. I can't change the evidence as Attorney General. I can advocate for but can't change most of the law. We can take the tough positions to advocate for public safety, which is always paramount in every case, and that is what we do. That is our policy, to protect—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I'd like to ask the crowns and the police if those six charges that were dropped were not warranted. That doesn't sell. The reality is that we're talking about court backlogs, efficiency in the system. That's why public safety is being jeopardized on a regular basis by this minister and the system that he is supposedly responsible for but won't accept any responsibility for the bad and faulty decisions being made.

We should ask about this individual, and I'll put it on the record again. The police describe him as a very violent man with an extensive criminal record, yet your officials decided to drop six very serious charges against this man. When he was sentenced and completed his sentence, why didn't you apply under Criminal Code 810.2 and make an application for electronic monitoring of this individual so we could at least track his movements in the city?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I repeat: Without speaking to the specifics of an individual case which is now the subject of a police investigation for some very serious charges, my friend would know that the resolution of charges in what he calls "plea bargaining" has been around long before I started practice. It was around when he was a Solicitor General. I don't think that he would suggest that plea bargaining when he was the Solicitor General occurred only in circumstances to clear backlogs, to get rid of charges. I think he would suggest that he took a tough position, as a member of a government, on crime, as do we: Public safety is paramount, the resolution of charges always dependent on the facts of the case and the law that applies. That is—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

1100

CHILD CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services.

My colleague the MPP for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and grandparents who are raising their grandchildren are rallying right now in Hamilton, as I speak. They want the ministry's Hamilton staff to comply with the minister's response to my colleague's question on October 7 about eligibility for temporary care assistance funding. The minister said, "I'm not asking the director of services to not use his or her judgment for special circumstances."

Each of these grandchildren who live with their grandparents do so under very, very special circumstances. Will this minister direct her staff to recognize these special circumstances and ensure that they're eligible for full temporary care assistance funding?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I want to thank the member from the third party for her question.

Again, I'm going to repeat it: Every grandparent who qualifies for temporary care assistance will receive temporary care assistance. It is temporary. And, yes, the director of the program in each municipality has some flexibility, because we cannot establish every rule so clearly to make a decision as to who is entitled and who is not entitled. The rule has not been changed. It was the same rule when the third party was in power, and we will continue to apply it. Every grandparent who qualifies will receive the money.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This minister appears to be really desperate to find someone else to fault in this situation, and now she's even faulting her own staff. The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek was very clear—and last time, she actually accused him, accused the member asking the question, of somehow interfering with the process and advocating a means test, which is absolutely unacceptable.

He and the grandparents are asking the minister to commit to three very fundamental, basic things: that all at-risk grandchildren being raised by their grandparents are eligible for temporary care assistance; that "duration of assistance" means that no time limits are set on the availability of TCA, which may be needed for years and years, as the minister knows very well; and that "settled intent" is not grounds to deny temporary care assistance.

Will this minister finally take responsibility for this fiasco and reinstate the directives and interpretations that ensure grandchildren—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: The member is right. The member from Hamilton East blew the whistle because the program was not applied equitably across the province; we reviewed it, and that was true. So we made sure that every grandparent who qualifies for temporary care assistance will receive the benefits. However, they want the program to be income-tested. It's not income-tested right now. Again, if it's income-tested, 75% of grandparents will not qualify. Do they want us to change the rules? The question is theirs.

CHILD CARE

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Minister, over the last several weeks and today, my constituents have heard conflicting stories about your ministry's temporary care assistance program. Opposition members have accused your ministry of cutting off grandparents from this program, which offers assistance to children most in need. The member for Hamilton

East-Stoney Creek has continually suggested that you have changed the rules, forcing many to exit this program.

Minister, the people of Ontario deserve a clear and honest response. On behalf of grandparents across the province, could you please stand in your place and clear the record?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I want to thank the MPP from Guelph for her interest in the lives of Ontario's most vulnerable.

The member is right. The people of Ontario deserve the correct information, so let me make this very clear. My ministry has not changed the rules in regard to eligibility for the TCA program. The budget has been increased again this year, to \$12.8 million. This is almost 14% more than the year before. This December—

Interjection.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes, this has changed. This December, they will receive a 2% increase. What did these two opposition parties do? They voted against it.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I note in the record in Hansard that it's not just the NDP who have been attempting to spin this issue. In fact, last Thursday in the House, the Conservative member for Dufferin-Caledon stated, "The minister must know that once an Ontario resident turns 65, they no longer qualify for social assistance and would be turned away."

Minister, is that true? You suggested on several occasions over the last two weeks that if grandparents were ineligible for the temporary care assistance program, they could apply for some of Ontario's long-term social assistance programs. Minister, can an individual over the age of 65 be eligible for Ontario Works?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Merci again for the question. In fact, all individuals over the age of 18 may be eligible for Ontario Works basic financial assistance if they meet program eligibility requirements, including those over the age of 65—again, including those over the age of 65.

But the member from Dufferin-Caledon was on a very slippery slope when she was talking about our record. Let me quote from the years 1997 to 2002: The budget for the TCA program went from \$14.5 million to \$8.9 million. So the Conservative Party slashed a very, very important program. This party is an uncaring Conservative party.

VIOLENT CRIME

Mr. Toby Barrett: To the Attorney General: A year and a half ago, I told this Legislature about an incident involving a military assault rifle being carried behind Caledonia's Notre Dame elementary school. Turtle Island News reported that Mr. VanEvery "threatened another man in his late twenties with an AK-47 rifle." He then shot up a smoke shack on provincial Highway 6 in Caledonia. At the time, he already had 74 previous convictions, 43 of which were gun-related.

How does one get 43 convictions, gun-related convictions, and still be allowed to walk around free with an AK-47 on the Ontario-government-owned Douglas Creek Estates, to walk around behind a school and to shoot up a smoke shack?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I think the member asks an important series of questions. I don't have all the details about the specifics of the case that he raises, so let's deal with some of the policy issues.

If he asks our position with respect to whether we think handguns should be in greater circulation or lesser circulation in the province of Ontario, I say "lesser circulation," and that would apply to AK-47s as well. If he asks whether we need to take a look at the laws that apply to those in possession of firearms, I say "absolutely." My colleague Michael Bryant and Premier McGuinty pushed hard for reverse-onus bail and mandatory minimums for serious gun crimes. Is there more to do? There may well be—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Attorney General, VanEvery was sentenced to four and a half years in jail just the other day. He'll probably get out in a year and a half. There was plea bargaining, where 13 counts of attempted murder were dropped. The same four-and-a-half-year sentence was given to VanEvery almost a decade ago for selling illegal weapons imported into Canada.

Why are your crown attorneys pleading away offences like 13 counts of attempted murder, using an AK-47, a military assault rifle, for a man with 74 previous convictions? How can the public respect the administration of justice? Is this yet another example of your catch-and-release justice system?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: People must have confidence and will have confidence that when cases are resolved in the context of the Criminal Code in our courts, they're resolved on the basis of what facts can be proven and resolved on the basis of what law applies. It is challenging sometimes, when we hear the short question or the headline, to wonder what happened, but the crowns begin from the position that public safety is paramount, and that's determined on the basis of what we can actually prove in the courts—which is where it counts—and what law actually applies.

As far as federal parole law is concerned, I think he and I are happy to have a discussion about that, but we know that I can't change it. It would have to be the federal government that changes that.

1110

POVERTY

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Yesterday almost 400 people gathered at Queen's Park to tell the McGuinty government to make poverty reduction a priority during this economic slowdown. They told the government that it must, at a minimum, reduce poverty by 25% in five

years; at a minimum, include a poverty-proof minimum wage, new affordable housing and child care, and livable social assistance rates; and, at a minimum, significantly invest in poverty reduction in the 2009 budget. My question is simple: Will the government's poverty reduction strategy meet the group's minimum expectations?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member opposite for his question and his ongoing advocacy for those who need a little extra help. I welcome the support of members from all sides of the House as we collectively work to reduce poverty in this province.

I'm going to take this opportunity—I know I will have a supplementary—to say thank you to the members of 25 in 5. They have done an excellent job in raising the issue of poverty across this province. They have come together to work with government to help us understand their issues—and the other way around. They have been a tremendous force in getting communities across the province sitting around a table and talking about solutions to poverty. So I would like to say thank you to Pat Capponi and the leadership of 25 in 5 for the excellent work they have been doing in this province.

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is not about the group, because the group, of course, is doing excellent work; my question is about whether or not this government is going to meet their minimum expectations. Ontarians across the province expect a serious poverty reduction strategy from this government: 88% of Ontarians want at least a 25% poverty reduction in five years; 87% want a minimum wage above the poverty line; 92% want more affordable housing.

My question again: Will the government listen to Ontarians and commit to strong action on poverty this December, or will you continue to sentence families to a lifetime of poverty?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I can assure the member opposite that our poverty reduction strategy will be a very serious strategy indeed. We have brought together an unprecedented combination of ministers. This entire government is working together to develop a poverty reduction strategy. I would be hard-pressed to think of any government that has ever put this kind of inter-ministerial approach toward a common goal. So I can assure you: Yes, of course it will be a serious poverty reduction strategy, and I look forward to its release by the end of the year.

FOODLAND ONTARIO AWARDS

Mr. Jeff Leal: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Constituents in my riding have acknowledged just how important it is to their health and local economy to buy locally grown and locally produced foods, certainly supported by Ms. Herma van Beek, the president of the Peterborough County Federation of Agriculture. Buying local is a great way to promote the local agricultural economy while at the same time protecting the environment, because food

travels a shorter distance when you are able to secure it locally.

Another important component of an effective strategy to increase the demand for locally grown and produced food is to recognize the important work that has been undertaken by industry partners. I noticed in my local paper an article about Mr. Dave Morello, the owner of Morello's Your Independent Grocer store in Peterborough, who won a Platinum-All Seasons award for the eighth consecutive year under the Foodland Ontario Retailer Awards. Minister, could you please tell this House more about this wonderful awards program?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: First, I'd like to say, congratulations to Mr. Morello. I'm happy that the member has asked a question that allows me to talk about the great work that is happening in the grocery sector with respect to promoting Ontario food products.

Earlier this month, my ministry was pleased to announce the 2008 Foodland Ontario Retailer Awards. This is an annual event, and it's a tremendous opportunity to support Ontario-grown fresh produce. The outstanding and innovative efforts of 37 grocers across the province were recognized in this year's awards. There are five award categories, including a new category under Pick Ontario Freshness, and the five categories are Platinum All Seasons Award, which recognizes merchandising excellence; a Gold Category Award that is given to the chain and independent stores that showcase seasonal, creative and cross-merchandised items—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Leal: Thank you, Minister. Recognition for retailers who have caught the wave of the locally grown food movement is critical in the sustainability of this movement. Buying food produced locally in Ontario just makes sense. The food is fresh and healthy and it is helping our local farmers, who in turn add significant value to the local economy. The agri-food sector contributes billions of dollars to Ontario's economy.

These retail awards will go a long way towards advancing our goals of having a more self-reliant food system in Ontario. It's good to know that some of these major retailers are taking an important first step towards the availability of local foods in their stores and the promotion of these great products.

Minister, you mentioned that there is a new category this year, the Pick Ontario Freshness category. What is this category for and who were the Pick Ontario Freshness award recipients this year?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Yes, we do have a new category. Foodland Ontario is over 30 years old now and has done an excellent job promoting Ontario food products, but they are also working to partner with our \$56-million Pick Ontario Freshness strategy. We now have a new award, and it is given to retailers who have expanded their in-store programs to promote the broader range of Ontario food products that are now under the Foodland Ontario umbrella. That includes meat products, processed foods, eggs, breads and so on.

Some of these award winners include the Sobey's food chain for their Compliments private label promoting fresh Ontario beef, pork, chicken and poultry, and Highland Farms for cross-department promotion of fresh Ontario food products. Loblaw Companies Ltd. is promoting Ontario corn-feed beef, and Longo's is promoting Ontario pork, lamb and veal.

We very much appreciate that these larger chains are getting on board—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question?

VIOLENT CRIME

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Attorney General. We've just found out that a 14-year-old was stabbed at Don Mills Collegiate this morning. Over the weekend, another 14-year-old was stabbed at a birthday party, and two weeks before that, a 14-year-old was stabbed to death on his way home from school in Brampton.

You've had the Curling-McMurtry report since May of this year. When are you going to take action to protect our young people?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Of course, we're very saddened by any violent events, and our hearts go out to the families affected. I say with respect to the roots-of-violence report, the Curling-McMurtry report, that the Premier will speak to that. It's a report to him. We're looking forward to its release.

Our position as a government generally has been that we want to be not only tough on violence but tough on the causes, which is why, for the past couple of years in particular, several ministries have been investing in communities to make sure that our young people have the opportunities that will keep them out of violent behaviour. The TAVIS project, which has often looked at crime enforcement, actually involves making very positive community contacts with students, school authorities and other—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Attorney General, people are outraged that this sort of activity is happening in our communities. Public safety is clearly at risk, and this is not a time to sit around and think about things. The time is now for urgent action. What are you planning to do?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Just hot off the press, to correct a misapprehension, we're looking forward to receiving the Curling-McMurtry report. It has not actually yet been delivered. But, you know—

Interjections.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Sorry. You proceeded on an assumption. What is important, and I think what my friend and I will share, is how to invest in communities that in some cases had not been invested in for many, many years to make sure that young people have the educational supports, the post-secondary education and training supports, both of which we have supported

significantly, the other community investments which we've undertaken over the past couple of years in conjunction with the city of Toronto, and looking forward to what to do next to make sure there is a positive future for every young person in our most challenged communities.

1120

WASTE MANAGEMENT

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre des Richesses naturelles. As of October 31, the 400 residents of Estaire, an unorganized area southeast of my riding, have been given notice by the MNR that their waste transfer site will be closed. Minister, these residents want to be part of the solution in establishing a new waste management strategy, yet the deadlines given by the MNR are impossible to meet. What is the minister doing to help unorganized areas like Estaire manage their waste in a responsible way?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I'd like to thank the member for the question. It's an issue the north is facing that's quite significant, and that is: As the landfills are filling up, what are we going to do with the waste?

There have been a number of proposals brought forward by the communities themselves. I was really pleased to hear about the innovative approach that a number took, Schreiber being one of them, to look at a different approach to collection of waste and maybe utilizing that waste into electricity. That, I understand, is under way as an opportunity maybe to work with the— the OPA, the Ontario Power Authority. How quickly one forgets. Anyway, that was one.

The other is that we are sitting down with the communities to look at what the alternatives are, as opposed to the fact that we know there is such limited land space available for waste management.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

M^{me} France Gélinas: We understand that MNR is getting out of the waste management business, yet no financial assistance has been given to the people of northern Ontario and arbitrary deadlines are being set. More or less, people in northern Ontario are left holding the bag, and we all know what is in that bag.

The decision by the MNR means that residents have no choice. They end up putting their garbage on back roads, in the bushes, basically anywhere they can get rid of it. Is it the intent of the MNR that the bush in and around unorganized areas becomes a great big dump site, or does the minister have a plan to help unorganized communities like Estaire develop doable waste management? Don't leave them alone.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: Actually, I don't believe that the people of the north would be so foolish as to just dump their garbage. They are actually into recycling, reducing and reusing. They know they have a challenge around their waste management, and I don't believe their answer is to dump their garbage somewhere else. They are looking for solutions and working with us on how we can manage this very difficult challenge, recognizing that they have very limited space with which to work.

Having said that, I'm more than prepared to sit down with the member on any specific site to work out with the community how we can move forward. We know this is a challenge in the north, and we'll continue to work with the communities wherever it's possible.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Reza Moridi: My question is for the Minister of Government Services. In my community, like most across Ontario, environmental issues are of increasing importance. The Ontario government employs tens of thousands of employees across the province. What are you doing to ensure the government is reducing its environmental footprint and leading by example?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I appreciate that important question by the honourable member opposite. Like people in his community, our public service is absolutely committed to a greener future. We have captured OPS creativity by establishing a permanent OPS ideas program which encourages public servants to suggest ways to enhance high-quality, cost-efficient services to the people of Ontario. To date, we have received over 2,000 great ideas. A number of these are in support of our desire to be a government that is keen and green.

One great idea was to use LED light technology in traffic lights. This was adopted by the MTO. Today, all MTO traffic signals have been converted, saving us 80%. These lamps, by the way, last five times longer. That's what I call a bright—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Reza Moridi: I applaud the initiatives of the OPS. We are lucky to have such a talented group of individuals working across the province. It sounds like good progress is being made, but I'm concerned that there isn't a coordinated approach to these kinds of initiatives in government, and I am not the only one who is concerned about this. In his latest report, the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario recommended that the Ministry of Government Services establish a central greening office that would oversee such initiatives, as well as encourage environmentally responsible practices.

My question is: What is being done to ensure that these kinds of efforts are coordinated and are not just isolated one-offs?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'm happy to inform the House that in September of this year, we created a green office within the Ministry of Government Services. It's going to play a key leadership role in coordinating the numerous exciting green initiatives across the OPS. With support from the climate change secretariat, the green office will support policy development, tracking and reporting employee engagement and education as related to sustainability. In addition, this team will drive cultural and behavioural change within the OPS. It's going to save us money. It's going to reduce our energy costs and reduce our overall environmental footprint. With an OPS so brimming with keen and green ideas, I think that augurs

well for the future of Ontarians as we attempt to reduce our carbon footprint across this great province.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. On August 22, the minister, through the OPA, released the RFP for renewable energy supply III. Since then, the world economic situation has severely limited access to capital. This will surely result in higher bids as developers face significantly higher and increased costs of financing. Minister, these costs will ultimately be borne by the electricity consumer. Will you do the prudent thing and extend the deadline for the RFP for 90 days while markets stabilize, thereby protecting electricity consumers from higher-than-necessary electricity costs here in the province of Ontario?

Hon. George Smitherman: It's not surprising that the honourable member, who comes from a party that had no energy action or policy, is now asking the government that has one to stop. I want to say to the honourable member that it is our determined view that here in the province of Ontario a good part of the green economy will emerge around the ongoing efforts to bring more renewable energy to life in the province of Ontario.

Over the course of the next few weeks, three large new wind farms will open in the province of Ontario, reasserting our leadership across the country and, within one year actually, nearly doubling the amount of energy that we're receiving from wind power alone. We are pleased with the billions of dollars of investment that have resulted from our efforts so far, and we will continue to lead forward in the province of Ontario, implementing renewable energy strategies and enhancing our ability to lessen and lighten the load on Mother Earth.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. John Yakabuski: We're all interested and encouraging the development of more renewable energy, Mr. Minister. However, it's your responsibility to see that we get there at an affordable cost. Your Premier and your Minister of Finance, last week, said it is no longer business as usual. You should have taken a hint from that. In fact, you've delayed the IPSP yourself here in the province of Ontario.

Minister, subscribers to this program have said to you that because of lack of access to capital, costs are going to be up during this RFP. If you extend this deadline, those costs should go down. Will you not stand together with energy consumers in the province of Ontario and recognize that you have an opportunity to do the right thing for them by extending this deadline in very volatile times in a world market? You can help energy consumers by extending this deadline. I ask you again: Will you extend this deadline for 90 days while the world market stabilizes?

Hon. George Smitherman: They're back at it again. The same party that, through a lack of action, deprived Ontarians from the opportunity to get off coal, stands in the Legislature today, in a time when most people say it's

appropriate to look for investment in infrastructure—and energy is certainly an important element of infrastructure—and says, “Let’s take a 90-day time-out,” as if the honourable member has some magic connection to officials that indicates what the implications are for 90 days.

Of course, there are challenges out there, but so far, in the responsiveness to these programs, we have seen investors—the private sector, entrepreneurs—step up to the plate, working with local communities, and turn those things that are renewable like the wind and the sun and the water into opportunities to power our homes. We will continue to make investments alongside those individuals, and enhance our use of renewables and our opportunity to lighten our impact on Mother Earth.

LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. Last week, I asked you when you were going to direct Ontario Northland to stop crossing the picket line at the Xstrata strike in Timmins. Can you tell us, now that you’ve had a chance to review the situation, when you gave the directive to them to stop doing so?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thank you, to the member, for the question. Indeed, as you know, I did contact the ONTC after you asked the question. They did indeed provide that service to the company as one of their major customers, but they were apprised of the concerns that were there and they committed that that will not be happening again. So that was a one-time instance. It won’t be happening again.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, we’ll be monitoring the situation, but here is the interesting part. Now we have Ontario Northland lending equipment to Xstrata in order to move trains on their property.

I ask you again: When is the McGuinty government going to tell the ONR to stay out of that picket line and allow the parties to resolve their issues and not cross the picket line by way of either staff or using crown equipment to go on to that property?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Again, thank you very much for the question. Indeed, that was a one-time occurrence, as I indicated. As the ONTC acknowledged and recognized, it will not be happening again. Certainly, there are other measures that have been put in place to try to deal with some of the implications of the loss of revenue to one of their main customers. But I can assure you that the determination was made very clearly to me that that was indeed a one-time occurrence. It was an opportunity for them to recognize that there were some concerns expressed about this, and an opportunity for me to express our concerns and our belief in and support for the collective bargaining system. I can tell you that that indeed was a one-time occurrence and it will not be happening again.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for question period has ended. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1133 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Peter Fonseca: We have some special guests with us here today. I’d like to introduce Bill Nicholls and Alex Lolua from the Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario, Andrew Sefton from the Ontario Painting Contractors Association, Ian Cunningham from the Council of Ontario Construction Associations, and Richard Lyall from RESCON.

Mr. Frank Klees: I’d like to introduce Mr. Bill Murdoch, who is visiting the chamber today.

Interjections.

MEMBERS’ STATEMENTS

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. John Yakabuski: For five years, the McGuinty government has been whistling past the graveyard as jobs disappear in record numbers. They wring their collective hands, display concern for the media, tell everyone that the fault lies elsewhere and then they do what they do best: They appoint a member of the government to study the situation, hire a bunch of new staff, spend millions of dollars and present the people of Ontario with little more than a large travel and hotel bill. Nothing really changes, but that Liberal member gets a whole whack of air miles.

With the situation getting worse instead of better, the government must recognize that what it needs to do is get out of the way. The Ministry of Natural Resources must end its fixation with unnecessary and expensive regulatory burdens and help our businesses compete. When I look at what is happening in the forestry industry under the Liberals, I have to ask myself: How much more can they stand? The operators in my riding are facing the worst of times with the closure of the Smurfit-Stone pulp mill. What they need right now is the government to stand with them, not against them. There are some possible alternatives that would provide new markets for their wood residue, such as cogeneration and wood pelletization. What they don’t need is a government whose *raison d’être* is, “How can we act as an impediment? How can we make it difficult?” I ask the minister today to commit to a new partnership with the province’s forest industry, with a new mantra: Let’s get people working again. Let’s get it done.

FORESTVIEW PUBLIC SCHOOL

Mr. Kim Craitor: I’m pleased to have the opportunity to share some good news with this House. I had the opportunity to attend the opening of Forestview

Public School last week, and I was impressed with the students who gave performances, especially Jessica Mucciante, who delivered an outstanding solo version of O Canada. I also enjoyed the opportunity to speak with the many parents who are so engaged in their school community.

I want to tell you that at Forestview Public School, students will receive the kind of education that allows them to reach their full potential, to learn, to share and grow alongside their peers. As well, I want to tell you that the school was built with sustainability in mind. The school is extremely efficient. It was constructed using the most environmentally friendly practices available, but the school is so much more than just bricks and mortar. It's about creating the kind of caring and supportive environment that allows students to learn, grow and share alongside their peers, as I said.

I would also recognize the hard work and staff of Forestview school, led by the principal, Todd Bright. I ask this House and everyone across Ontario to congratulate the district school board and the staff at Forestview Public School for their beautiful new facility and their commitment to student success in our community.

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Toby Barrett: A number of young farmers have regrettably fallen through the cracks instead of getting assistance from the Ontario cattle, hog and horticulture program. Yesterday I toured a 600-sow wing of Bartside Farms. It's a hog operation between Empire Corners and Sinclairville. It was set up by the Bartels family in 2005.

Wayne, age 35, and his brother Geoff, 28, invested \$3 million just to build two barns. Now they're in trouble. Their father is disabled by a brain tumour. Their line of credit just dropped from \$250,000 to \$170,000 and they've eaten up most of a \$400,000 loan just over this past summer. They have missed out on the \$100,000 that they expected from the program.

We discussed a number of questions yesterday:

(1) Is Ag Minister Dombrowsky making any headway, now that she has been fully briefed on this shortfall in the program, on the fact that many young and beginning farmers have been missed, not only in hog production but also in beef and horticulture?

(2) Will Minister Dombrowsky meet with these overlooked farmers?

(3) Will this Ontario government be working on a new program to assist those farmers who had little or no financial data available between 2000 and 2004? After all, young and beginning farmers are dealing with the same lower commodity prices, the same higher input costs, the same decline in value of inventory and related financing challenges as those farmers who did receive the assistance.

FIREFIGHTERS' MEMORIAL

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It is a pleasure to rise in the House today. I want to tell you about a generous donation

that has been made by the Oakville Professional Fire Fighters Association to the Ontario fallen firefighter memorial restoration fund.

On October 17 of this year, the Oakville Professional Fire Fighters Association was the first association in Ontario to donate \$2,000 to the restoration fundraiser, and that's an amount of about \$10 per member.

Earlier this year, members will recall, the memorial was vandalized. What was vandalized that day were the names of 420 Ontario firefighters who lost their lives in the line of duty, and their names are engraved on this memorial.

Each year, the names of fallen firefighters are added to the memorial in a special ceremony. The memorial is a measure of our gratitude in Ontario to those firefighters who paid the ultimate sacrifice in service to their community, and to their colleagues, who continue to risk their lives for us each and every day.

I'd like to thank the Oakville firefighters for their generous contribution, and hope that this challenge will instil a sense of pride in all associations in the province to follow the lead set by Oakville. If every firefighter in the province contributes his \$10, the cost of the restoration will be covered. But anybody in the House, individuals and corporations can also make contributions to the Ontario fallen firefighter memorial restoration fund by visiting any TD Canada Trust branch in the province of Ontario.

FLU IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Ted Arnott: I've long believed that our free flu shot program, introduced by Elizabeth Witmer when she was Minister of Health, has saved lives, and today's Globe and Mail confirms it. Each year, our flu shots are saving over 300 lives, preventing 1,000 hospital admissions and avoiding over 30,000 visits to emergency rooms. This comes from a study published in the prestigious medical journal PLoS Medicine, which implicitly acknowledges the faith and foresight of the Ontario government of the day.

There is still no jurisdiction other than Ontario that offers a free flu shot to anyone who wants one. Those of us who were in the Legislature in the late 1990s remember the clogged emergency departments and Elizabeth Witmer's determination to solve the problem while increasing health funding overall.

The chief medical officer of health for Ontario at the time was Dr. Colin D'Cunha. It was his idea that free flu shots, made widely accessible, would reduce the pressure on our emergency departments.

1510

I remember that there were skeptics. In those days, I had the privilege of serving on the cabinet committee on health and social services, but I remember the focused resolve of Elizabeth Witmer, who, as Minister of Health, championed the idea and saw it through. The member for Kitchener-Waterloo demonstrated exemplary leadership. Ontarians continue to benefit from her accomplishments

during her tenure as Minister of Health. Ontarians will continue to benefit from her service in this House for many years to come.

CANADIANS FOR CHILDREN AT HEALTH RISK

Mr. Michael Prue: I rise today to talk about a small charitable group called the Canadians for Children at Health Risk. It is led by a wonderful woman by the name of Zolen Georgievska, and she and her small band of people try very hard to raise funds for people in the Third World and people in Canada, particularly our aboriginal communities, who are at risk due to war, disease, deformity and poverty. They work doing a lot of really good stuff for people but they also work with Canadian artists, who donate works of art to them so that they are able, in turn, to auction them off and raise funds for the charity.

They are holding their ninth annual art auction this Sunday, November 2, between 2 and 5 o'clock, at the Balmy Beach Club in the heart of the beach right at the foot of Beech Avenue, south of Queen. I, again this year, will be their auctioneer. A delightful time is had by all.

We hope that people will come out. We hope that they will bid and come out in great numbers and collect some really wonderful art, things that can be used for Christmas presents and the like. For further information, I invite the public to call 416-762-3541 or to contact Canadians for Children at Health Risk at childrenathealthrisk.com for further information. Hope to see you all there.

WINE INDUSTRY

Mr. Bruce Crozier: I'm pleased to rise today in the House to inform all the members that 2008 has been an excellent year for wine producers in Essex county. Thanks to our region's dry, sunny summer weather, wineries in my riding expect the best 2008 vintages in all of Ontario.

Until the end of the 19th century, the Lake Erie North Shore region of southwestern Ontario was the earliest and most vibrant commercial wine-growing area in Canada. Today, as a designated viticulture area, the Lake Erie North Shore region is home to 13 wineries, and that number is growing, re-establishing its reputation as one of the best wine regions in the world. Ontario's wine sector extends past the juice which is pressed from this beautiful fruit, to employing approximately 6,900 individuals, research and innovation opportunities, and it attracts tourists from around the world.

During 2006-07, 54.1 million litres of Ontario wine were sold in our province, and 80% of Canada's grapes are grown there. I encourage all members to attend the wine-tasting reception on November 5, next Wednesday, hosted by the Speaker and the Grape Growers of Ontario and partake in the selection of the 2008-09 Ontario legislative wines, and taste, judge and enjoy the best that Ontario wine producers have to offer.

GARY MORDEN

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: Yesterday I was honoured to attend the funeral of Mississauga Fire Chief Gary Morden, who lost his battle with cancer last week. Chief Morden began his career with the Mississauga Fire Department 31 years ago and became the city's fourth chief in 1999. Chief Morden always took a hands-on approach to his job and advocated for aggressive fire prevention and public education programs, believing there is no honour in fighting a fire that can be prevented. Chief Morden's work in the area of emergency medical response was so exceptional, it earned him the nickname "Doc."

On behalf of the city of Mississauga and everyone here in this Legislature, I would like to express my heartfelt condolences to Chief Morden's wife, Denise, his two sons, Jason and Shawn, and the entire Morden family. Gary was a true hero, and his contribution to our community will be remembered forever and never be forgotten.

DIWALI

Mr. Kuldip Kular: South Asians throughout the world are today celebrating the festival of Diwali. Known as the festival of lights, this auspicious occasion holds spiritual significance for Sikhs, Hindus, Jains and, more broadly, is a national festival for Indians and Indo-Canadians. Diwali is traditionally marked with the decoration of homes with lights, displays of fireworks and the sharing of gifts and delicacies.

For Sikhs, this festival celebrates the return of their sixth guru, Guru Hargobind Ji, and 52 princes who had been detained as political prisoners in the Gwalior Fort. As the guru liberated the 52 princes, so the sixth Guru Ji is known as Bandi Chhor—liberator.

It's a day that reminds Hindus of the spiritual victory of good over evil, an awakening to inner peace. Jains, meanwhile, recall the moment Lord Mahavira attained nirvana. For all South Asians, however, Diwali is a celebration of the conclusion of the harvest season, similar to Canadian Thanksgiving.

As is customary, I wish to convey my best wishes and warmest regards to the constituents, colleagues and to all who observe this festival for a peaceful, prosperous and joyous new year. Happy Diwali.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on General Government and move its adoption.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill 85, An Act to permit the issuance of photo cards to residents of Ontario and to make complementary amendments to the Highway Traffic Act / Projet de loi 85, Loi permettant la délivrance de cartes-photo aux résidents de l'Ontario et apportant des modifications complémentaires au Code de la route.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1517 to 1522.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour of the Standing Committee on General Government and Bill 85 will please stand one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura
Arnott, Ted
Bailey, Robert
Barrett, Toby
Bentley, Christopher
Bradley, James J.
Brown, Michael A.
Bryant, Michael
Colle, Mike
Craitor, Kim
Crozier, Bruce
Delaney, Bob
Dickson, Joe
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Fonseca, Peter

Hardeman, Ernie
Hoy, Pat
Jaczek, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Jones, Sylvia
Klees, Frank
Kular, Kuldeep
Leal, Jeff
Mangat, Amrit
Mauro, Bill
McMeekin, Ted
McNeely, Phil
Miller, Norm
Naqvi, Yasir
O'Toole, John

Qaadri, Shafiq
Ramal, Khalil
Rinaldi, Lou
Ruprecht, Tony
Sandals, Liz
Scott, Laurie
Smith, Monique
Sousa, Charles
Van Bommel, Maria
Watson, Jim
Wilkinson, John
Wilson, Jim
Yakabuski, John
Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed?

Nays

Bisson, Gilles
Gélinas, France
Hillier, Randy

Horwath, Andrea
Kormos, Peter
Miller, Paul

Murdoch, Bill
Prue, Michael
Tabuns, Peter

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 44; the nays are 9.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

USE OF ELECTRONIC DEVICES IN HOUSE

Mr. Peter Kormos: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: During the course of that vote, we all heard the unmistakable electronic noise of a BlackBerry. In view of the legislation that we anticipate from the Minister of Transportation, I say to you that you can resolve this issue for this chamber by using your power to ban BlackBerries in this chamber so those sorts of disruptions simply don't happen.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thank the member for the point of order. I will remind all members

and the table as well of the importance of not having their BlackBerries present, particularly when a member is speaking.

To the point of order that was raised by the honourable member from Welland, I would welcome the opportunity that it be discussed amongst the House leaders. We have a Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly, and I think it would be a very good topic for discussion at the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly. Perhaps the Chair, the member from Scarborough-Rouge River, would consider that.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: On that point of order, Mr. Speaker: I have a different point of view.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I would like to speak on that point of order also. We in this corner would agree with the member, Mr. Kormos.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): It's nice to know that there's unanimity in the House and that the independent caucus is 100% behind the proposal of the member from Welland.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the October 28, 2008, report of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 107(f)9, the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

COUNTERING DISTRACTED DRIVING AND PROMOTING GREEN TRANSPORTATION ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 VISANT À COMBATTRE LA CONDUITE INATTENTIVE ET À PROMOUVOIR LES TRANSPORTS ÉCOLOGIQUES

Mr. Bradley moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 118, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the use of devices with display screens and handheld communication and entertainment devices and to amend the Public Vehicles Act with respect to car pool vehicles / Projet de loi 118, Loi modifiant le Code de la route afin d'interdire l'usage d'appareils à écran et d'appareils portatifs de télécommunications et de divertissement et modifiant la Loi sur les véhicules de transport en commun à l'égard des véhicules de covoiturage.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The minister for a short statement?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I will reserve that for the time of ministerial statements.

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA SÉCURITÉ PROFESSIONNELLE ET L'ASSURANCE CONTRE LES ACCIDENTS DU TRAVAIL

Mr. Fonseca moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 119, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 / Projet de loi 119, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The minister for a short statement?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I'll make a statement during ministerial statements.

1530

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

ROAD SAFETY

Hon. James J. Bradley: I rise in the House today to address the Legislature about a significant public safety issue. Research tells us that drivers who use cellphones are four times more likely to be in a crash than a driver who is focused on the road. Drivers who are busy text-messaging, e-mailing, dialling or talking on their cellphones are too preoccupied to properly drive their cars. Transport Canada tells us that driver distraction is a contributing factor in about 20% of all collisions in this country. A recent Ontario Medical Association study urged the government to take action to address driving while using a cellphone.

Around the world, approximately 50 countries, such as Australia and the United Kingdom, have banned the use of cellphones by drivers unless using them hands-free. In the United States, there are bans in California, Connecticut, the District of Columbia, New Jersey, New York and Washington. In Canada, similar bans already exist in Nova Scotia, Quebec, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

We know that these new technologies have created some tremendous conveniences. But we know something else: Deep down, we all know it is dangerous to use them while driving. In the past, the McGuinty government has taken tough action to deal with drivers who continue to

drink and drive and those who think our roads are meant for street racing. Today, I'm asking you to take another important step to save lives, prevent injuries and keep our communities safe. The legislation I'm introducing today will, if passed, fight driver distraction by banning text-messaging, e-mailing, dialling and chatting on hand-held cellphones and other electronic entertainment devices while driving. Anyone who chooses to break this law would face a fine of up to \$500.

We are also proposing to broaden the current ban on televisions that are visible to the driver to include other devices with display screens, such as DVD players. That does not mean that other distractions are not important. Drivers must take extreme care when doing anything, including using hands-free devices, that would divide their attention from the task of driving even for an instant. Drivers who do not focus on the task of driving should not be driving. Those who put others at risk by allowing themselves to become distracted—for any reason—could be charged with careless driving under the Highway Traffic Act or even dangerous driving, a criminal offence.

It is time to take a tough stand. We need to stop this danger on our roads. Our "eyes on the road, hands on the wheel" bill could prevent tragedies before they happen. With the use of cellphones and other hand-held electronic devices on the rise, we must deal with this issue now.

We're not alone in our thinking here. Our government has the support of many organizations, some of which are represented in the gallery today. Earlier today, I was joined by the Ontario Medical Association, the Insurance Bureau of Canada, the Canadian Automobile Association, the Ontario Provincial Police, the Ontario Safety League and many others who stood beside us as we announced our plans.

Innovation in safety and public security has been one of the defining characteristics of this government. This new legislation could be another part of that agenda of innovation. We must continue to ensure that we address new risks and hazards as they arise. As with all of the safety reforms we have introduced, our purpose is clear: It is to preserve and strengthen Ontario's outstanding record of public safety on our roads, a record that has been in effect for many years, through many governments. The proposed legislation supports the McGuinty government's commitment to prevent injury and reduce traffic collisions.

Our government believes that road safety must be a top priority. Our goal is to keep Ontario's roads among the safest in North America. We must ensure the safety of every Ontarian, protect families, keep communities safe, and create better health for Ontarians.

But this bill is about more than safer roads; it is also about cleaner air. You may have noticed that our proposed legislation is entitled the Countering Distracted Driving and Promoting Green Transportation Act. I would like to take a moment to explain to all members the green component of this legislation.

Encouraging more Ontarians to carpool is part of Ontario's plan to reduce harmful emissions, ease traffic

congestion and fight climate change. That is why the proposed legislation also includes measures to remove the existing red tape associated with forming carpools in Ontario.

At this time, I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge all of those who have made a contribution to this particular effort, including my colleagues in the Legislature who offer, from time to time, much advice to us. Those would include, if I can go to the last piece of the legislation first: Mr. Gilles Bisson, the member for Timmins—James Bay, who has introduced a bill regarding carpooling; Mr. John O'Toole, the member for Durham, who has on numerous occasions introduced such legislation and who expressed his views so well on the radio this morning, as I was listening carefully to his counsel and advice; and my colleague Mr. Kevin Flynn, who introduced legislation that would have banned electronic devices being used by young people who are in the formative days of driving.

In this Legislature, not all of the good ideas exist in one caucus alone or among one group of individuals; they exist amongst all of us. I always look forward to the wise counsel and advice I get from my critics in the opposition, from my own colleagues in government, from everyone in the Legislature and from interest groups and individuals who have much to say about how we can improve our roads and road safety.

I urge all members to support this bill, and I thank you for your attention and for your strong support to this point in time.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I'm pleased to introduce proposed amendments to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997, that, if passed, will be good for our province's construction industry and fight the underground economy.

The proposed bill, if passed, would extend mandatory workers' compensation coverage to independent operators, sole proprietors, partners in a partnership and executive officers of corporations in the construction industry. These individuals are not currently required to purchase Workplace Safety and Insurance Board coverage. However, because of the transient nature of construction and the difficulty determining on-site who is eligible for an exemption, there has been abuse of current exemptions by certain individuals and companies wishing to gain a competitive advantage. These unsavoury practices undermine legitimate contractors and reduce health and safety on construction sites.

By doing this, we are helping legitimate construction employers be competitive in the marketplace when bidding on construction jobs. If the proposed amendments are passed, they would not fully come into effect earlier than 2012. This time frame will allow the WSIB to make the necessary technical and administrative changes and speak with construction stakeholders about how the proposed changes would be implemented. The

three-year implementation period will also allow business to properly understand and prepare for the new rules.

We have listened to stakeholders and have proposed an exemption for mandatory coverage for those individuals who exclusively perform home renovation work and are retained directly by the homeowner, family member or occupant of the home.

1540

As a result of our working with our stakeholders, we have received support for our proposals from leaders in the construction field. Bill Nicholls, who is with us here today, president of the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario, commented on our proposals, saying, "The industry has been working to end this unfair practice for a very long time." Doug Chalmers, director of Aluma Systems in Sarnia, Ontario, has said, "This will make Ontario a safer place to work and improve the quality of life for all of us."

My colleagues, I am sure, have heard stories, many of them at our constituency offices, of some independent operators in construction who unfortunately have been injured on the job and did not have insurance coverage and now find themselves without assistance. If they could turn back the clock, many would gladly have paid the WSIB coverage in order to be eligible for compensation and provide support for themselves and their families. Insurance costs money but it provides peace of mind.

Some will say that private insurance can do the same thing that the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act coverage does. Let it be clear, however, that private insurance is not an alternative for Workplace Safety and Insurance Board coverage in this case. WSIB coverage includes a sophisticated prevention component, return-to-work training and other services which are provided by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board.

In conclusion, this proposed amendment is one more important step the McGuinty government is taking to promote healthier, safer and fairer workplaces as well as fight the underground economy.

At this time I want to commend my ministry office staff, in particular Rob Walters and Julie Garner and the rest of the staff who are working diligently on this, as well as the entire Ministry of Labour for all their work, and also the stakeholders who have worked diligently to bring us to this point. Many of them are here today. I want to thank them for all their work.

This is good public policy and something that those in construction who play by the rules need and deserve.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Statements by ministries? Responses.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd first like to thank the minister for his imitation or reflections on the history of the bill. I think any form of imitation is a compliment in itself.

That being said, I want to thank our critic Frank Klees and indeed our caucus, because we've always been very

strongly in support of legislation that makes our roads safer, like the speed limiter bill from Laurie Scott, as well as the street racing bill by Frank Klees.

I would also like to say that this is the first time I will be supporting, probably, a Liberal bill that proposes a ban of any sort, like sushi and pit bulls.

I would encourage public hearings on this bill first, and in that I would like to think that we have also worked with the stakeholders, the insurance bureau, the CAA, the OPP and the Ontario Medical Association, as well as recognize that business today is a mobile activity for many places. Trucking and transport and logistical companies are certainly going to be interested, and it should be a priority here for the minister to listen.

Since I introduced my bill in 1999 I have seen, witnessed and participated in other provinces'—in fact, in all three provinces I have spoken directly with their ministries of transportation. I encourage the minister to move forward, but to do so with consultation. Importantly, there must be resources allocated which would indicate the need to educate the public. The most important first step is to educate the public, and then the resources for policing on the enforcement side of the issues.

Not to be cynical, but to turn the clock a little bit, I hope that Premier McGuinty's staff didn't force Minister Bradley to introduce this bill as a distraction from the real issues facing Ontarians: the issue of the economy, which is on a collision course for the people of Ontario. I caution the minister not to take this too seriously. The economy is issue number one. Jobs and the deficit are issue number one.

My advice to all those listening—to the minister and to the drivers—is that driving is a privilege, not a right. Keep your eyes on the road, your hands on the wheel and your mind on the job. Drive safely.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Mr. Robert Bailey: On behalf of the official opposition, I'd like to respond to the Minister of Labour's announcement about extending mandatory WSIB coverage to the entire construction sector. This bill is not only ill-conceived, but the timing of it couldn't be worse. I've thought a lot about this, and I think the actual title of this bill should be Working Families' Payback Time.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I remind the member of standing order 23(i). I would just remind him of that standing order.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you for that reminder, Mr. Speaker.

At a time of economic crisis—someone will have to look that one up for me—the government has decided to make it even more expensive to operate a small business in Ontario. This announcement today is effectively a new tax increase that will cost small construction companies up to \$11,000 per year. That's all this is. The government should be trying to make it easier to do business in Ontario, not more expensive.

I'm not sure how the government and the minister think that extending mandatory WSIB coverage will help solve the problem of uninsured workers. If making false claims to the WSIB is such a big problem, instead of focusing on an approach that won't even get to the underground economy, the government should direct the WSIB to move on with current discussions in bringing in a named insurance system, as the Premier promised to do. Doing so would allow the WSIB to track those who are covered and those who aren't. That's the way to eliminate fraudulent claims. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business said as much to you last week when they delivered over 25,000 faxes from their concerned members.

It's clear from the minister's statement today that he doesn't have a clue about how the system works. His three predecessors did. The Honourable Chris Bentley, the Honourable Steve Peters and the Honourable Brad Duguid, after consulting on mandatory coverage, each came to the conclusion that it was not the right way to go. Were they all wrong, Minister?

Besides it being a new tax, our side of the House has a problem with the fact that these new rules are going to force independent operators, owners, officers and directors of companies to pay for insurance that they are never going to use. When was the last time that anybody in this House heard of a small business operator taking time off from work? Never. They can't afford to. Talk about insult to injury.

In the end, all this legislation will do is enlarge the WSIB's coffers—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, sir. Responses?

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to respond to the Minister of Labour's statement. It's a privilege for me to respond to this statement that finally addresses mandatory workers' compensation and benefit coverage for construction workers not covered now. This legislation would mean more security for about 90,000 workers and their families. On behalf of the NDP caucus, I want to thank the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario for their advocacy on this issue over the last 15 years.

Two years ago, the council raised its concern that the use of independent operators has resulted in thousands of workers in the construction industry potentially being deprived of coverage and has created a group of employees who are entitled to claim benefits but for whom no contributions have been made. With the amendments that we will suggest, the final legislation will achieve coverage for these vulnerable workers. The NDP supports the thrust of this legislation. It's time the independent operators loophole is closed, that all construction workers are covered and the freeloading problem is solved.

We are concerned about exemptions related to private contractors dealing directly with homeowners and will be

addressing these during the bill's committee process. We will be closely scrutinizing the clauses relating to the questionnaire to ensure that they are deleted or, where necessary, so clear that manipulation and error are not possible, as should be the case with all clauses and regulations.

The opportunity is now before us to ensure that the full health and safety committees' procedures and practices are required and implemented in these dangerous work sites. Workers and contractors will now have both the desire and the legal imperative to ensure safety first. As the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council stated in its brief for the Minister of Labour in 2006, "In the case of medical aid, the burden is shifted to the health care system without being handled by the WSIB, as it should be."

1550

A new prescribed prevention funding formula, which will help health and safety services like inspection and enforcement, will also be on our list of amendments. The NDP will be advocating for implementation no later than January 1, 2010. The amendments that we will propose will be in the best interests of the industry and the many construction workers who face unprotected risk every day that they go to work. But I must say that, unfortunately, it's my understanding that this full implementation could take between three and four years. This is unacceptable. This legislation should move more quickly and should be dealt with expediently.

I commend the minister for moving in this direction, but of course he knows that my pet peeve is not being addressed. There are things in this WSIB ministry that have to be dealt with. Experience rating is high on my list and the process of deeming is high on my list. When—and I hope it's soon—this minister will make a real, true effort to rectify this injustice with this experience rating system, I will be in full support of his changes, which will be beneficial to the workers of Ontario.

I know that it's a big portfolio and I know there's a lot more to be done, but I must confess I'm glad to see that this new minister is taking an initiative. It's not everything we'd like to see, but I hope he will look at the other areas and not just focus on one, because there are a lot of things in the WSIB program that need to be addressed. I hope I can sit down and, as the government always says to us that they want to work with us to better the lives of the working people of Ontario, I'll be the first to sit down at the table with the minister for improvements in other areas in his portfolio.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: A bill has been introduced in the House today in order to ban cellphones, maybe not in the Legislature but certainly in cars across Ontario. We are supportive of this initiative. I would just say to the minister that there are a whole bunch of other activities in the car that we should be looking at during the process of this committee hearing. For example, I was driving down the

401 the other day to go to a leadership event in London, and some guy was driving with his knee on the steering wheel, eating a hamburger with two hands. Maybe we should be banning hamburgers from cars. It wasn't me, I've got to say. I don't like hamburgers. But my point is that we need to look at other distractions going on in cars when people are driving, and hopefully during the committee process we'll get a chance to do that.

PETITIONS

EMERGENCY DISPATCH SERVICES

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with 911 services in Muskoka and Parry Sound, and it reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is considering relocating emergency ambulance and fire dispatch services currently provided by Muskoka Ambulance Communications Service to the city of Barrie; and

"Whereas up to 40% of all calls received are from cellphones from people unfamiliar with the area; and

"Whereas Muskoka-Parry Sound residents have grave concerns about the effect on emergency response times if dispatch services are provided by dispatchers who are not familiar with the area; and

"Whereas 16 Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care-funded jobs, held by qualified communication officers from local communities, may be lost as a result of the relocation of dispatch services to the city of Barrie,

"Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario put the safety, health and economic concerns of the people of Muskoka-Parry Sound ahead of government efficiency interests and ensure that emergency dispatch services continue to be provided locally by Muskoka Ambulance Communications Service."

I support this petition.

POLICE RECORDS CHECK

Mr. Michael Prue: I have a petition here signed literally by hundreds of people across the length and breadth of this province. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas, under current practice, police services across Ontario retain records of accompaniment to the hospital for mental health assessment. Accompaniment to the hospital is permitted under the Mental Health Act. Many employers, volunteer agencies and educational facilities request a police records check prior to hiring an applicant or allowing them to volunteer if they will be working with children, seniors or persons with disabilities. Most police services release Mental Health Act records as part of the police records check. In order to continue the application process, the applicant must

disclose the record to the potential employer or forgo the position out of fear of further discrimination and the desire to keep health information confidential. The practice of releasing these records violates the privacy rights, as well as the human rights, of Ontarians with Mental Health Act records. We ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass legislation that would prohibit the disclosure of Mental Health Act records as part of the police records check process;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The current practice of disclosing information regarding non-criminal contact with police pursuant to the Mental Health Act discriminates against Ontarians with both diagnosed and perceived mental health disabilities. We believe this information constitutes personal health information and as such should not be released as part of a police records check. Only criminal convictions for which a pardon has not been granted and records from the pardoned sex offender database should be released on a police records check.

"We petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass legislation which would protect the human rights of all Ontarians by prohibiting the disclosure of Mental Health Act records."

I am in agreement with this, and I sign my name thereto.

DIALYSIS

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition here from the Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans in Canada from Branch 365, the Beaver Club in Barrie, Ontario, on George St. This is from Neil McKinnon, the president for 33 years, who sends this petition.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas we wish to express concern and frustration over the lack of an in-hospital dialysis clinic within the city of Barrie. At present the RVH dialysis clinic has reached capacity with a waiting list. These patients are residents of Barrie and must receive life-sustaining treatments outside our city limits. We respectfully request that the assembly review the business plan submitted to the North Simcoe Muskoka LHIN that requests funding for the aforementioned clinic development.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The patients and concerned family members and friends receiving care at the Royal Victoria Hospital dialysis clinic wish to express concern and frustration over the lack of an in-hospital dialysis clinic within the city of Barrie.

"We, the undersigned, respectfully request that the assembly review the business plan submitted by North Simcoe Muskoka LHIN, which requests funding for the aforementioned clinic development."

I support this petition and I support the good veterans at the army, navy and air force Branch 365 in Barrie, Ontario.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mr. Frank Klees: This petition is to the Parliament of Ontario.

"Whereas the legacy of Pope John Paul II reflects his lifelong commitment to international understanding, peace and the defence of equality and human rights;

"Whereas his legacy has an all-embracing meaning that is particularly relevant to Canada's multi-faith and multicultural traditions;

"Whereas, as one of the great spiritual leaders of contemporary times, Pope John Paul II visited Ontario during his pontificate of more than 25 years and, on his visits, was enthusiastically greeted by Ontario's diverse religious and cultural communities;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to grant speedy passage into law of the private member's bill by ... MPP Frank Klees entitled An Act to proclaim Pope John Paul II Day."

As a proponent of that bill, I'm pleased to affix my signature and thank former MP Jesse Flis for submitting these petitions.

CHILD PROTECTION

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Whereas Ontario is one of the few provinces that does not have independent oversight of child welfare administration; and

"Whereas eight provinces now have independent oversight of child welfare issues, including child protection; ...

"Therefore, be it resolved that we support the Ombudsman having the power to probe decisions and investigate complaints concerning the province's children's aid societies (CAS)."

I have signed this.

1600

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Joe Dickson: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Rouge Valley Health board reversed the 2006 announcement closing the maternity and pediatric services at the Ajax-Pickering hospital due to an overwhelming public outcry; and

"Whereas the Rouge Valley Health board of directors has recently approved closing the 20-bed mental health patient unit at the Ajax-Pickering hospital; and

"Whereas there remains further concern by residents for future maternity/pediatric closings ... even with the Ontario Ministry of Health's largest-ever expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital; and

"Whereas there is a natural boundary, the Rouge Valley, that clearly separates the two distinct areas of Scarborough and Durham region;

"We, the undersigned, therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Central East Local Health Integration Network ... and the Rouge Valley Health System ... board of directors review the Rouge Valley Health System make-up and group Scarborough Centenary hospital with the three other Scarborough hospitals; and

"Further, that we position the Ajax-Pickering hospital within Lakeridge Health, thus combining all of our hospitals in Durham region under one Durham region administration."

I shall affix my signature to this and pass it to Emily.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. John Yakabuski: I have in my hand thousands of petitions from across the province of Ontario for gas tax fairness. Today I read one from the town council of the town of Hawkesbury and signed by many of the residents there.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the skyrocketing price of gasoline is causing hardship to families across Ontario; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberal government charges a gasoline tax of 14.7 cents per litre to drivers in all parts of Ontario; and

"Whereas gasoline tax revenues now go exclusively to big cities with transit systems, while roads and bridges crumble in other communities across Ontario; and

"Whereas residents of Ontario have been shut out of provincial gasoline tax revenues to which they have contributed; and

"Whereas whatever one-time money has flowed to municipalities from the McGuinty Liberal government has been neither stable nor predictable and has been insufficient to meet our infrastructure needs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to redistribute provincial gasoline tax revenues fairly to all communities across the province."

Of course I sign this petition, as I support it, as I am the originator of it.

FERTILITY TREATMENT

Mr. Pat Hoy: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the prevalence and growing incidence of infertility in our population is a medical issue that demands the attention of our public health care system and should be placed on the agenda for funding;

"Whereas fertility treatment, including in vitro fertilization, is a proven medical solution that is unfairly limited to those with the financial means to pursue it, and it should receive significant coverage through the Ontario health care system as soon as possible;

"Whereas in vitro fertilization should be fully funded when deemed medically necessary, without discrimination based on cause or gender; and

"Whereas it is long overdue that financial assistance for fertility treatment be offered to Ontarians. We are residents of the province of Ontario and request that the Ontario provincial government address this important issue.

"We, the undersigned, strongly support the inclusion of financial assistance by the Ontario Ministry of Health under the Ontario health care program for all fertility treatment for Ontarians, male and female."

This is signed by a number of residents from Chatham, Ontario, and I affix my signature.

SEXUAL REASSIGNMENT SURGERY

Mr. Jim Wilson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the previous Progressive Conservative government determined sex change operations were not a medical spending priority and instead chose to invest in essential health care services; and

"Whereas Premier McGuinty said in 2004 that funding for sex change operations was not a priority of his government; and

"Whereas the current Liberal government has eliminated and reduced OHIP coverage for chiropractic, optometry and physiotherapy services; and

"Whereas the present shortage of doctors and nurses, troubling waiting times for emergency services and other treatment, operational challenges at many hospitals, as well as a crisis in our long-term-care homes signify the current government has not met their health care commitments;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario does not fund sex change operations under OHIP and instead concentrates its priorities on essential health services and directs our health care resources to improve patient care for Ontarians."

I agree with this petition and I've signed it.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition against illegal guns in cars.

To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the growing number of unlawful firearms in motor vehicles is threatening innocent citizens and our police officers;

"Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and being found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, entitled the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I totally support this petition, and I affix my name to it.

DRIVER LICENCES

Mr. Toby Barrett: These petitions are titled "Delhi Wants Its MTO Office Back," and they're to the Parliament of Ontario.

"Whereas the community of Delhi has historically had a driver's licence issuing office; and

"Whereas the current government set out a request for proposal for a new operator of a driver's licence issuing office in Delhi; and

"Whereas many individuals in the town of Delhi responded to the RFP and paid \$68 in application fees to the Ontario government; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government, after collecting this money from Delhi citizens, has decided against reopening an issuing office in Delhi; and

"Whereas the residents of Delhi are currently being forced to drive 20 kilometres to the nearest issuing office;

"We, the undersigned, demand the McGuinty government revisit the proposals already received and reopen an office to meet the needs of residents within the community."

The signatures: many are from Delhi, also Windham Centre, La Salette, Langton and Simcoe.

OPPOSITION DAY

VIOLENT CRIME

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Whereas the alarming number of murders and other violent crimes allegedly committed by violent criminals who were out on bail for other alleged violent crimes in Ontario raises Ontarians' fears for their safety and shakes the public's confidence in the administration of justice in Ontario; and

Whereas the issue of violent crimes alleged to have been committed by people out on bail when they should have been behind bars based on their past criminal behaviour is a serious public safety problem that the McGuinty government has failed to address since being first elected in 2003;

The Legislature of Ontario calls on the McGuinty government to call a public inquiry into Ontario's bail system.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Mr. Runciman has moved opposition day number 3. I recognize the Leader of the Opposition to lead off the debate.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I appreciate this opportunity. Given the rulings of the Chair and comments by others in the past, including the Integrity Commissioner, there is obviously some concern about the sub judice convention, and I will be cautious with respect to my remarks and certainly make every effort to respect the standing orders of the Legislature.

The catalyst behind this motion—from my perspective, in any event—was the double murder of two women in Scarborough on October 13. I went to the funeral of the two ladies. It was a very emotional experience. There were over 1,000 people at the funeral. The evening before the viewing, they estimated that in excess of 4,000 people attended the viewing. This was for Mrs. Saramma Varughese and her daughter, Susan or Suja John. I just want to read a bit about Saramma, which is in the booklet that was distributed at the funeral.

"Saramma, as a wife, mother and grandmother, was humble, devoted, loving and selfless in all that she did." And Suja: "As a loving and caring mother, Suja inherited most of the qualities of her own mother, the late Saramma. In addition to her humble and gentle nature, she had a giving heart and always put her family and friends before herself."

1610

This is a situation where Chief Bill Blair, the Toronto Police chief, for those who don't know who Mr. Blair is, said that these murders were completely unnecessary, that they shouldn't have happened. He says that because the gentleman in question, the individual who was accused of these outrageous murders, was out on bail, released by the Ontario courts. He was put into house arrest and put into a neighbourhood where the neighbours had no understanding or appreciation of who was in their midst, and of course these two wonderful women were murdered in the sanctity of their own home.

It's a real tragedy, and with my experience as both a justice minister for almost six years and a critic for many more in the justice area, I think this is the most egregious failing of the justice system that I have witnessed. I believe that if we look at the papers on an almost daily basis, we see example after example of the system failing the people of this province. I just opened the Toronto Sun this morning. There was a story in there about an individual who was wanted by the police for a shooting in a Toronto neighbourhood, a high-density residential neighbourhood. The police described this individual as someone who was out on bail for charges of armed robbery. This goes on and on, and all too frequently we see instances where innocent victims, innocent bystanders, are caught in the crossfire of individuals whom courts have allowed to return into society.

We could go on, and this doesn't necessarily touch on the bail issue, but it touches on the issue of confidence in the bail system, and I referenced it in this House on a couple of occasions over the past two days: the shootings

on the weekend, which resulted in the death of Bailey Zaveda, who came from Brockville, my home own—her mother still lives in Brockville—an innocent victim who happened to step outside a local pub and was caught in the crossfire of an individual who had been charged in 2005 with another shooting, had been charged with seven charges that were going to court in 2006, and the crown dropped six of those seven very serious charges. As a result of that, along with credit for time served awaiting trial, the individual in question was out I think after 25 months and back on the streets. I've made the argument in the House today that if the crown had fulfilled its responsibilities and pursued all of those charges, which the police and the crown felt had merit at the time that they were laid, that individual would not have been out on the street this past weekend and Bailey Zaveda could well have been in our midst today and not been the victim of a random shooting, in the sense that she was in no way involved.

This is really about a court system that is failing Ontarians, and we continue to ask the Attorney General questions on this in the House, to raise these issues, and he continues to defend a system that clearly is not working in terms of public safety for Ontarians. I'm not sure why he's doing that, why he feels he has to do that. We were hopeful—I was hopeful; I'm being quite sincere here today, given what's happening in our midst on an almost daily basis—that he and his colleagues would be supporting the motion today to have an inquiry into the system to find out what's wrong, to pull back the curtains, expose the weaknesses in the system and work together to correct it, to ensure that the public can be as safe as we can possibly make in it terms of the way the justice system operates in this province. But, regrettably, he has taken a different view, and continuing to try and keep the inner machinations of the system from public view.

My colleague the House leader for the NDP, who I believe will be speaking to this later on, is a former defence lawyer. He and I were chatting about the system earlier and he had a very apt description for what the justice system looks like in Ontario today. He described it as a "sausage factory." There is so much truth to that description. I know a great many police officers look at what's going on in the courts, the costs associated with it, the delays associated with it, the ill-prepared crowns and the sort of cursory look at so many areas that are significant in terms of public safety.

I suggested to the Attorney General today that a lot of the rationale behind some of these decisions—the suspicion is that this is all about court backlogs, full dockets and crowns who don't want to be involved in bail hearings. It's all about a system that is in a mess, and the people responsible don't want to publicly own up to it or do something about it.

Again, I said I don't want to find myself violating the sub judice convention. I gained access to the bail transcripts for the individual accused in the double murders of the two women in their home in Scarborough, and I

want to correct the record. Earlier today, I indicated to the Attorney General in a question that the crown had not opposed bail. That was from a quick reading this morning of the transcript. What, in fact, occurred—the judge makes reference to the fact that the crown seeks to detain. That is the only reference I could find. I'm not going to get into specifics again. There is a publication ban as well. But I can say that when I scanned the comments of the crown, there was no comment whatsoever with respect to bail or concern about bail. The only reference I could find was the comment from the judge presiding who said, as I said earlier, that the crown seeks to detain.

If you look at the rationale—and I won't get into the specifics again—they boggle the mind. I think it's public knowledge, so I believe it's safe to repeat this, but you never know any more. This individual was charged, and these are two cold cases—this is gleaned from the media, not from the transcripts—of violent sexual assaults, and the charge initially was delayed on the basis of DNA evidence linking this individual to the crime.

It's difficult for me, and I suspect for most in the public, to look at a situation like this where there are clear DNA linkages to a crime and a court will make a decision to release. This was, in my view, clearly rolling the dice with public safety. The crown, in my view, did not do its job, number one, by not appealing to the Superior Court. They have a 30-day period in which to do so, and if the Attorney General wants to complain about federal legislation, I suppose, if the federal court upheld the bail decision, perhaps he could have a valid argument. But when his employees in the crown law office fail to do what I believe is their clear responsibility in situations like this, I think he has to assume responsibility for decisions taken by people within his employ, and that didn't happen. He continues to refuse to accept any degree of responsibility for what's not happening within the ministry he's responsible for.

We hear, continuously, arguments in this House about the federal government. We're blaming the federal government for not moving quickly enough in this area or that area. They're not supporting us in this initiative or that initiative.

1620

Well, that may all be well and good, and there may be instances when we can be in full agreement with the Attorney General and the government in terms of legislative changes or initiatives that can be taken to improve public safety, but the other side of that coin is that the provincial government and the Ministry of the Attorney General have a clear set of options and tools available to them to make sure they are doing the best they can to ensure public safety.

I mentioned a few of them. Appeal, obviously, is one where they can appeal to the Superior Court. They can request electronic monitoring of an individual that they feel continues to pose a danger. Perhaps the Attorney General, when he speaks, can talk about electronic monitoring. I understand as well that they have diminished our capability in this province to electronically monitor

individuals. Perhaps that's the problem: The request is not going forward. I don't know. Again, so much of this is behind the curtains, behind closed doors, and we're restricted from gaining access to that by so many rules and regulations which do not take into consideration the rights of victims, in many instances, or the good of the population at large.

I know a lot of members want to speak to this issue. This is a genuine concern. I would hope that members of the government would speak in a positive way about this as well. I'm not sure who the MPP is who represents the two women who were murdered in their own home, but I hope he or she is here today. I hope he or she will participate in this debate. I gather there's a petition with something like 15,000 names on it, sponsored by the church that the two ladies attended, calling for a public inquiry into the bail system. Hopefully that member is listening to his constituents and is as concerned as I am and as my colleagues are with respect to the revolving-door justice system that currently exists in this province.

I just want to quickly say that I think we have to try to find ways to address the situation in a non-partisan fashion. We've talked about this earlier; we talked about it in a resolution on the economy. We get into these battles across the floor which serve no one well. I think we have to accept that we're trying to be sincere, we're genuinely concerned about public safety in this province, and we're raising these issues as a responsible opposition. We're not trying to score political points, as some would suggest. We have a responsibility in this place to make sure that these issues are brought to the floor and that the government responds to them in an appropriate manner.

I just want to quickly say that under the Criminal Code there are three provisions that the court has to consider when they are making a bail release decision: (1) the likelihood of the accused to return to court; (2) the likelihood of reoffending; and (3) the possibility of bringing disrepute to the justice system. Well, I think disrepute has been brought to the justice system, not just in this particular instance but in so many on an almost regular basis. That's the reality, whether the minister and his colleagues want to accept it or not.

I think in this instance, the likelihood of reoffending was substantial. I can't say this was a real breakdown in the system, because this may be par for the course in the system. If you look at the transcript, and I encourage anyone to take a look at what happened here, you have to be shocked. You have to be shocked by the conversation that occurs, and you have to be shocked by the lack of concern for public safety. You have to be concerned about the lack of opportunity for police officials to have input and the lack of, I think, steel-minded determination on the part of the crown to stand up for public safety—completely missing. This is all kind of routine business: "Let's get on with the next case and move it through the system." That's the real problem. That's the reality of the justice system in the province of Ontario today.

Regrettably, the minister has fallen into the pattern of defending all of this instead of standing up and saying,

"You know, we do have real problems here. I'm going to work with you. I'm going to work with all members of this place to ensure that we improve the system to give the greatest degree of public safety to the public as possible."

I get frustrated about this because it goes on and on and on and we don't get any substantive answers. We always get: "We're going to be jeopardizing a future court case. We're going to be jeopardizing the rights of the accused." Well, I think it's about time we started giving greater priority to the rights of innocent people in this province.

That's what this motion is all about. We're trying to open up the system. Let's see what's wrong, let's correct it and let's make Ontario a much better place in which to work, live and raise a family.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this motion, and I will be joined by my colleague Peter Tabuns, the member for Toronto-Danforth, who will be addressing this motion as well.

During the course of this afternoon, I want to commend the Leader of the Opposition, Bob Runciman, the member for Leeds-Grenville, for bringing this motion forward. I have known him for all of my 20 years at Queen's Park. He's got a little more seniority than I do, but I have known him consistently, during those 20 years, to be a tireless advocate for victims of crime and a courageous spokesperson for victims here in this chamber and, indeed, outside this chamber, and he bears some of the scars that people who crusade in that manner almost inevitably acquire.

This is a deadly serious matter—yes, it's a deadly serious matter. I can say that when one rises as Mr. Runciman did or as I suspect his colleagues will, as I do today, to express concern, it is reprehensible to try to translate that into some sort of disdain for our justice system. As a matter of fact, if anything, standing here today expressing concern is, I tell you, an expression of my incredible interest in ensuring that the Canadian justice system remains the model for democratic countries to emulate. Look, when people don't have confidence in the justice system; when victims don't have confidence; when, quite frankly, accused persons don't have confidence; when the public doesn't have confidence, we all suffer, we all pay a price, because the regard for law and order, then, is diminished as well, isn't it? It's incredibly important that our courts—and again, for the good chunk of time that I've had the opportunity to know judges at all levels of our courts, we probably—no, not probably. I, without hesitation, say that we have the best bench, certainly in Canada and internationally admired as well. I have no hesitation in saying that to you. The quality of our judges is superlative.

I've known a whole lot of crown attorneys and prosecutors as well. Again, they're hard-working women and men, most of them working for modest pay—I tell you, you don't get rich being a crown attorney or a

prosecutor—and working incredibly hard under incredibly difficult conditions. So you see, when I stand here, I'm not being critical of the judges in and of themselves, and I'm not being critical of crown attorneys. I'm certainly not being critical of the cops, and I've heard the Attorney General respond to Mr. Runciman, saying, "We've got a thousand more police on the street." Well, that's the whole point. If you think, as a witness via the newspaper, this is frustrating, imagine how frustrating it is for the cops who do the hard work, who do the heavy lifting, who piece together little bits and pieces of evidence gathered from across the province—and it was the most arduous of work—who then see their efforts frustrated by a system that's not working as well as it should. I'm being incredibly generous when I say that.

1630

Look, I am convinced because I've sat in enough bail courtrooms—I'll refer to them as that—and let's understand, I think it's fair to say that most people who are arrested are released without ever seeing a courtroom. They're released by the arresting officer; they're released at the police station by the officer in charge. Most arrested people never see the inside of a courtroom until their first court appearance.

Let's understand as well that I'm convinced there is an unacceptable number of people who cool their heels here in the Toronto Don Jail or metro east or metro west, waiting day after day for a bail hearing, who everybody knows are inevitably going to get released and should be released, but because the system is so clogged and suffering so many ailments, you've got people who are going to be released—make no mistake about it—who end up spending more than a few days in detention centres. The triage, if you will, isn't particularly effective, is it? I'm convinced that it's not unique to Ontario. I'm convinced it's happening across Ontario. There hasn't been an Attorney General since Ian Scott who hasn't had nightmares about Askov. One of the observations is that there's incredible pressure on our criminal justice system, and the pressure is evidenced from time to time, more often than anybody would want, by charges being stayed because of delays in prosecution.

Nobody from over here is questioning the need for the judiciary to be independent, and I've spoken out about our very good judiciary. Heck, we were supportive of the government's efforts some short time ago to upgrade the quality of justices of the peace. I've known a whole lot of justices of peace over the course of many years, and I tell you in Ontario we had justices of the peace who ranged from very, very good, quite frankly, to embarrassingly bad. In the case of most accused persons—it wasn't in the case of the notorious case that's been referenced—the justice of the peace is the front line. That's the first judicial officer that an accused and his or her lawyer and the crown attorney and the police have to deal with. I'm concerned that, notwithstanding legislation that was passed, we still haven't done enough to upgrade the quality of justices of the peace across the board here in Ontario.

The Leader of the Opposition attributed to me the comment that our courtrooms have a very unfortunate similarity to sausage factories. The rate at which cases are expected to be processed and the pressure on crown attorneys and their offices to deal with X number of files in a certain period of time is a pressure that I suggest to you gives rise to plea bargaining. We heard from the Attorney General in his discussion about plea bargaining, and plea bargaining is as old as the system itself. But we're talking about concerns about inappropriate plea bargaining, the goal or purpose of which is to simply clear the docket, when plea bargaining is the result of pressures on the crown's office and on the courtroom in terms of the courtroom space and on the availability of judges and on court staff.

How many victims have you spoken to? I suspect as many as I have, who have been the victims re-victimized by a plea bargain deal, who understood the rationale when the crown attorney said, "We weren't sure that we could get a conviction on the aggravated sexual assault, as compared to the common assault, that was pleaded to." But I've got to tell you, every single one of the victims I've talked to would far sooner have had their day in court and let a judge make a determination at the end of the day—far sooner. We have a Victims' Bill of Rights in this province that's been ruled to be effectively not worth the paper it's written on, and we've had no response—withstanding that it's now into its second term—from this government about giving the Victims' Bill of Rights the teeth that it needs to ensure that it's more than a declaration for office walls, or lip service.

And then of course the question is, could the Attorney General insist that his crowns oppose bail? I'm not about to suggest that the Attorney General told us anything other than what he believes to be very much the truth. But one can oppose bail vigorously, with evidence that's been put together and witnesses that have been presented to the court, or one can oppose bail in a somewhat more perfunctory way. My fear is that—and again, the pressures on crown attorneys in our courts are tremendous. While there may be the very, very rare—I'll suggest, an anomaly—crown attorney who would have a cavalier attitude towards it, I suggest to you that crown attorneys take their jobs very, very seriously. But if we don't have a standard being set by the Attorney General himself about the fact that you prepare for a bail hearing as thoroughly and with as much investigative work and presentation of evidence as you would a full-fledged trial, then we're going to have tragedies.

The public is outraged at the prospect of somebody being charged with serious, serious aggravated sexual assault being released on bail so that he or she has the capacity to commit yet further crimes and find him or herself charged with them. They don't feel protected by the system. The public has the right to feel protected by the system, don't they? The public has the right to know that—I'm not critical of the Charter of Rights. The public understands the Charter of Rights. The public understands how important a charter of rights is in a free and

democratic society. The public understands how important the presumption of innocence is. We all do; I hope we all do. The public understands that. The public wouldn't for a minute advocate doing away with the presumption of innocence. But as hard-working people, as people who pay taxes, as people who are prepared to invest in safe communities and police officers and their police forces, as people who are prepared to invest in ensuring that their kids are safe on the streets, whether it's downtown Yonge St. or downtown Welland or downtown Timmins, people want to know that that justice system is there to ensure that no innocent person is ever convicted. But it's also there to ensure that guilty people are dealt with appropriately and that people who pose a danger to the public are contained so that they can't have access to the public.

One can only guess at what motivates any judge at any given point in time to make a release order when any one of us would say, "Well, that's strange," because you take a look at the evidence that was presented to the judge and you take a look at the standards that are applicable in bail hearings, and it seems to me the judge could have made a detention order as readily. What the public doesn't understand, and notwithstanding that they understand very clearly the need for the independence of the judiciary, is why the Attorney General, then, if that office is so adamant that crown attorneys detain people in custody when they're charged with serious, serious offences like aggravated sexual assault—aggravated sexual assault is as horrific as it sounds. The public then says, "Why doesn't the Attorney General order reviews?"—effectively an appeal of that release.

1640

The Attorney General—and he may today stand up and say, "Well, the laws have to be changed." I'm not sure that the laws regarding detention have to be changed. I'm not sure that they don't warrant review. Of course. But unless and until those reviews are conducted, and if in fact they uphold the release orders that we find at the very least curious, then I say the system is breaking down, and it's not because of any absence of provisions in the Criminal Code, although one could be critical at any point in time of any part of the Criminal Code.

What does this motion ask for? We see it very clearly: a thorough review of how bail is granted, how bail is acquired, how release orders are obtained, how release orders are given; a thorough review of the resources that are available to cops and crown attorneys; a thorough review of the ability of the courts to properly conduct bail hearings in such a way that they can hear all of the evidence so that their decisions can be based upon all of the facts, not just some of the facts; an understanding of the quotas, formal or informal, that crown attorneys' offices may be under in order to get cases processed through; an understanding of why it is that some people cool their heels for days at a time charged with somewhat minor offences when you know that they are going to be released one way or another because the law is so, so clear, when others are released in what seems to be, as I say, such a perfunctory way.

Why is that information in any way dangerous? It seems to me very valuable information. It seems to me very important that we understand that. It seems to me that if we're going to—because I believe the criminal justice system has suffered from any number of phenomena, but certainly as a result of the phenomenon of people being released on serious charges only to commit offences equally serious or more serious again. It seems to me that we owe it to the system to find out what the shortcomings are, what the flaws are, what the defects are, what the problems are.

So I tell you, Speaker, that I intend to vote for this motion. I plan to stand with Mr. Runciman as he advocates and fights on behalf of victims of crime, and I do so with no hesitation, with no shame; in fact, with pride, because if that isn't one of the things that we should be doing here at Queen's Park as elected people, then we should all go home. If we can't raise these issues, if we have to function under a cloud of fear about raising them, then the problem extends far beyond our criminal justice system, doesn't it, Speaker? If a member of the Legislature has to risk censure or other consequences for conducting himself with integrity and in good faith on behalf of victims of crime, then I say to you, sir, we've got a fundamental problem here, not just in our court system.

The Criminal Code is federal; we know that. But the administration of those courts, the role of crown attorneys in the largest number of cases, and the conduct of bail hearings is entirely within the scope of the province of Ontario and its Attorney General, and Solicitor General insofar as the police are concerned. I say that we in this chamber have an obligation as provincial legislators to ensure that if there are flaws, if there are defects, if the system is ailing, then we diagnose those flaws, defects and ailments fast and we do everything we can to fix them. That's what Mr. Runciman's motion, in my view, is designed to do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I thank the members opposite for the comments already.

I want to say several things at the outset. To the families, to the communities affected by these terrible tragedies, our sympathies are with them. Tragedies like these naturally raise very important, troubling questions, and I wish to say to all that we share everybody's determination to do whatever is necessary to protect the public interest. The question is, what more can we do and must we do to ensure public safety, to prevent tragedies from happening in the future?

We act in the public interest; we always have. Public safety is paramount in that public interest. Although we as a country share jurisdiction in criminal law with different levels of government, we all serve the same people and we all work to protect the same communities. So in standing here today, I would echo the comments made by the Leader of the Opposition when he said this is not a partisan issue. It is not; it is an issue about ensuring the

protection of our communities, ensuring that we're doing whatever we must and can to protect those communities.

To the motion, which has at its heart a call for an inquiry, I say simply, "Inquiry no, but more action. Whatever we must do, we'll do." I say that we have moved where we recognize the need, we have advocated where it's clear that it was not within our power to move, and we will do whatever additionally is required within our power, and we will advocate for whatever further action we need to advocate for when the changes are not directly within our power but within the jurisdiction of another government.

I say to the Leader of the Opposition and members of the third party, what we're all interested in are the approaches and the solutions. As we proceed in the days, weeks and months ahead, I invite my colleagues opposite, as I do the members of our caucus and community members, to continue the work that we're doing with the police, with the crowns, yes, with members of the public, victims' rights advocates—with all of us who have a shared determination. Let's identify the actions that need to be taken to further protect public safety where we can.

It would be correct to say that we have moved in a number of different ways over the past five years, a number of which hadn't been identified when we came to be the government in 2003. We recognized at the time the need for more police officers, and we ensured there were more officers on the street: 1,000 additional officers, and another 329 announced just last Thursday. But we also recognized that there was an additional approach required for the very challenging issues that are presented by gun crime, by gangs, so we brought in the guns and gangs initiative—the operations centre, the task forces—and supported that further with the TAVIS initiative, which is for the greater Toronto area, and the PAVIS initiative, which is beyond, which is a different approach to the very serious issues posed by the dangerous and the violent. That is at the heart of discussion we're having: What further must we do to ensure that the dangerous, the violent and the out-of-control do not pose a risk to our communities?

There are initiatives that have been taken at the federal level to strengthen the legislative framework which binds judges, binds justices of the peace, binds the crowns, and yes, the defence counsel, which operate within them.

1650

Our government has advocated for a number of years for reverse onus bail for serious gun crimes and for more mandatory minimums for serious gun crimes. I have supported and congratulated publicly the federal government, the Conservative government, on the initiatives as they took them through. We have supported them publicly and privately as they moved through passage. We have been strong in our determination to make sure that the law reflects the needs of our communities, but we started that advocacy when there was a government of a different stripe federally. We started it notwithstanding that it might not have been popular with the government of the day. We will always advocate in the best interests

of the people of Ontario and always advocate for their safety.

There are some further actions that we have been advocating for which we believe would assist in protecting our communities, again, I say not as a partisan matter and not as the final answer to all issues. So with respect to young persons, there was legislation before the last Parliament, federally, dealing with changes to the Youth Criminal Justice Act. We advocated and pointed out—and we were not alone; there were Ministers of Justice or Attorneys General from across the country who said that for the out-of-control youth, the bail provisions were not strong enough in that amendment, and by definition, they're not strong enough in the existing legislation, and that the sentencing tools and provisions available to judges were not strong enough in the existing legislation for the out-of-control youth and in the legislative amendments. They needed to be toughened.

At the same time we advocated for that, I congratulated, publicly and privately, the Conservative government in Ottawa for proposing the introduction of deterrents and denunciation as important sentencing principles in their legislative amendments. This is not a partisan issue, and I join my friend the Leader of the Opposition when he says that. We may disagree about specific initiatives, we may disagree from time to time about the policy, but I suspect we share a passionate determination to protect public safety.

The issue has been raised in debate by my colleague opposite from time to time about pretrial credit for time in custody, an issue which is an old issue but has been increasingly used over the last, I would say, half dozen or so years. It sometime manifests itself in two-for-one credits, sometimes three-for-one, sometimes even more, when it comes to sentencing. We have called on the government, federally, to change the sentencing provisions within the Criminal Code which provide guidance to judges in determining the type of credit that can be taken into account. That has been an issue at federal-provincial-territorial conferences; an issue which has guided many.

I know my colleague opposite has spoken to it, so I expect we have, without knowing for sure, pretty close to a common interest on moving on this issue. We will renew our call when the new government is sworn in in Ottawa, not as a partisan issue, because I expect my colleague opposite, long before I was a member of this Legislature, might have said a thing or two about that; I don't know for sure, but I expect he might have—but as an initiative where we had taken a strong position as a provincial government to advocate for change in legislation. Advocating for a change does not make it partisan. It means that it's our respectful view that the interests of Ontarians demand that we end the automatic two-for-one or multiple-for-one credit of pretrial custody when it comes to sentencing, that the automatic imposition does not advance the principles of sentencing, with the greatest of respect, and that we should change that legislatively.

There have been and always will be comments about what somebody might have done by taking a particular

snapshot of a particular case. Unfortunately, we almost never have the facts or the law which must guide those decisions at the time the comment is made about the case—we don't have the full facts or the full knowledge of the law before the people who are hearing the snapshot comment about cases.

I would say this: The public should know that the people who work within the crown's office, within the police force, and, yes, as my colleague in the third party said, the judiciary, are determined to achieve justice. The crowns who take positions on cases take those positions placing the public safety as a paramount consideration. They take those positions knowing that whatever they personally may wish to happen, whatever they personally may believe that others would like, the positions taken must reflect the facts that can be proven in court and the law which guides the determination of any judicial proceeding. We take the strong, determined position to protect the public safety when it comes time for bail, when it comes time for the trial or guilty-plea resolutions of cases, and we will always do that.

So I say in outlining our approach to the specific request of the motion that it's action that we all want. It's whatever action is required to protect our communities that we all want. It's supporting—yes, supporting—innocent Ontarians that we all want. It's ensuring that we have done and that we do whatever needs to be done to protect them. When it's within our control as a province, we will take that action, and I look forward to my discussions with Chief Blair, other chiefs of police, the police community, the crowns, yes, community advocates and victims' rights advocates, and discussions with my colleagues and the suggestions as we move forward. I look forward to my discussions with the federal government and the new Ministers of Justice and Public Safety when they are sworn in, and I look forward to the determined effort to protect public safety, protect the rights of all of us in our communities. That is our responsibility. That's my responsibility; that is our collective legislative responsibility. I look forward to those suggestions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?
1700

Mr. Toby Barrett: In my view, a public inquiry into Ontario's bail system would just be one step to help restore the public's confidence in our justice system. I think of the chaos and the mayhem and the violence in the Caledonia, Haldimand and Brantford area over the last two and a half years with respect to land disputes. These troubled times have generated, locally, the phrase "catch and release." It's used by people on all sides of the issue, and all too often if someone is actually arrested, they're often merely given a slap on the wrist and then they're out in short order, oftentimes to reoffend. But all too often, as well, people are not charged.

During John Tory's visit to Caledonia quite recently, I was presented with a baseball cap that was emblazoned with the words, "What law?" People in town have

bumper stickers and window stickers that state, "Caledonia: No sheriff."

What we're seeing in Caledonia and throughout the area is oftentimes a refusal to apply the law to the facts. What's missing is an application of the law to the facts. In our society, one tenet is non-negotiable: The law applies equally to all. Everyone is equally subject to our laws, without exception. No one is above the law. No one is beneath the protection of those laws that we have in our society. Regrettably, this tenet does not apply in much of Dalton McGuinty's Ontario and certainly in part of my riding in Haldimand-Norfolk.

We know that "justice" is a term that's bandied about with respect to the violence associated with these native land disputes. Justice lies with the courts. I'm not a lawyer or a judge, but in my view justice is served by decisions rendered by our courts after a complete, balanced and open hearing of all the facts, coupled with a reasonable, objective and fair application of the law to those facts. However, locally, people question whether justice is being served.

I raised an issue in the House today with respect to Mr. Don VanEvery in Caledonia; it would be a year and a half ago that I raised the issue as well. He shot a person and very recently was sentenced to four and a half years in jail. During this court case, it became known that he had 74 previous convictions; 43 of these were gun-related—again, a recent example of why we need an inquiry into the administration of this catch-and-release justice system. This fellow was arrested perhaps 10 years ago on, at that time, many, many charges: possession of restricted weapons, smuggling guns into Canada. At that time, another 40 charges were withdrawn, and upon sentencing, the judge indicated that it was an astonishing array of offences.

This government has to take cues from our election platform. We have to be more proactive in appealing these kinds of orders.

Keep these people out of our communities and right some of the wrongs by supporting this motion put forward today. I put to the members opposite that if you're serious about restoring public confidence in this justice system, it's time to step up and support this motion by Bob Runciman.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: On behalf of the NDP, I certainly welcome this opportunity to address the resolution that's been brought forward.

I want to start by sharing with everyone here in this House and in this province my sadness at what has happened recently on our streets. I know that for people who have suffered a loss or suffered injury, this was nothing small in their lives. This was huge in their lives. There were losses incurred that can never, ever be replaced.

Certainly in my riding, Toronto-Danforth, one of the most recent notable killings happened at the Duke of York Tavern—an innocent young woman, standing out in front of that tavern, gunned down. She was just out in the evening air.

So when we discuss these issues, when we consider these issues, we know that there's substantial personal human cost that's attached to the decisions that we make, to the decisions that are made by this government. We owe it to the people of this province, to the people of the families that have been hurt, injured, who have suffered great loss, to deal with these questions substantially, to deal with them thoughtfully and to deal with them effectively. We want, everyone in this House wants and I know everyone out in Ontario wants action taken to stop violent crime.

I have to say it's surprising to me that I would find a common point with the leader of the opposition on this issue, because generally we start from very different philosophical bases—very different. There's no question in my mind that if you want to reduce violent crime, there's a whole host of actions that have to be taken around the social sources of crime if you want to come to grips with it. That being said, there still is the simple reality that in Ontario we have a justice system—judiciary, police, crown attorneys—that deals with the social failures that this society produces, the social mistakes that we as a society perpetuate that put us and our families, our children, at risk.

But the official opposition has a point that in fact there are substantial concerns that people have to have about the administration of criminal justice and the administration of the bail system. It isn't as though we have a perfect system. I was listening to Mr. Bentley, the Attorney General, who was saying, "Whatever we must do, we must do." I would urge him and I would urge his government to take this motion seriously and look at exactly how our bail system works, and focus in.

The decision around granting or not granting bail is a substantial, significant one in our criminal justice system. I've talked to criminal lawyers who've told me that they have clients—and Mr. Kormos here has spoken about this as well—who were taken in on minor charges and held for days at a time before they got a bail hearing. In fact, I've been told by criminal lawyers that one of the things that most often determine whether a person is going to plead guilty or not guilty is whether or not they're still in jail. Police and others make mistakes. So when you have a bail system, a justice system, that takes people and determines right off the likelihood of their pleading guilty or not guilty by whether or not their bail hearing is dealt with in a speedy and intelligent and thoughtful way, then you know you've got a problem.

I say to the government, you have a problem right across the system. What's been raised by the opposition is the whole question of people being released on bail who shouldn't be on the streets after they've been picked up, people who should be held until a trial is convened and it can be determined whether they're innocent or guilty but who, on the basis of all the evidence, the knowledge that a person would have before them, should be treated with extraordinary caution. But this system is one that we hear regularly allows people on the street who engage again in other crimes. Frankly, you have to ask, "So how thorough is this system?"

I was talking to the member from Welland before this debate who suggested to me, and he's right, that what you need is a system of triage, a rapid one, where you're evaluating risk, clearing out the people who are engaged or have been picked up on minor issues because they're clogging up the system, and where you have a substantial issue, a real problem, focusing your resources there and dealing with the problem so that this society is protected.

Again I have to say that the resolution before us asks for an inquiry. It doesn't ask to rewrite the law. It says, "We appear to have a problem." This problem is putting people's lives at risk, and I would add that this problem is putting people's criminal records, their status in society at risk because there are mistakes made in both directions. But all that's being asked for is an assessment of what appears to be a clear problem. If the government is concerned about the issue, if the government sees that there are problems, then this inquiry, this gathering of evidence and making of decisions, is one that it should welcome because, in fact, people recognize that there's a problem. Again, as the minister said, whatever we must do, we must do. I would say to the minister: You have a suggestion, it's a reasonable one that could be supported by people from a variety of different political perspectives, and you should take this resolution to heart and act on it.

1710

When we look at the numbers in Ontario, when we look at the numbers across Canada, there's no question that in Toronto, as compared to a number of other jurisdictions, in Ontario, as compared to a number other jurisdictions, you can say that we have better numbers on violent crime. But that doesn't mean that there is no problem, and it doesn't mean that there's not a problem that needs to be assessed, analyzed and acted upon. If in fact the government was willing to take this on, they would have the information in their hands to reshape the system because they run the police and the jails. They have the opportunity, through directions to justices of the peace, to make sure that this particular problem that has been cited by the opposition is dealt with.

One of the concerns I have, even though I support this resolution, is the track record of this government, and unfortunately others, of commissioning reports on justice reform and then letting them sit on a shelf and gather dust. After there has been the initial press conference, a media conference, the presentation, the praise for all those involved, the high-sounding words from the government, then the report is put in storage and not seen again until we have this debate and it's mentioned.

We've had a lot of thoughtful recommendations made over the years. They haven't been acted on. I'll give you one instance. The McMurtry report regarding crime victims: The government dismissed one of the more important recommendations—setting up a victims' advocate—just dismissed that out of hand.

So I ask, if we have had these reports, with intelligent recommendations, why is the minister saying that we will do whatever we must do? I think the reality is that that is

not the case, that is not what has been happening. That is why the kind of resolution that has come forward today from the opposition is before us and being debated.

We have a system that's clogged and overflowing. I know the member from Welland can speak to that, but in my riding I have a parole officer who deals on a daily basis with people who have been put on parole, on probation, and who have to report to him. His experience is a fairly straightforward one: The jails are so full that even when people violate the terms of their parole or probation, they come to him, he cites them for that, they go before a judge and they're given more probation—it's extended. So, in effect, he has no power to enforce those conditions. When you go to provincial court—and the member from Welland can detail it in a very colourful way—you have this incredible assembly line process of people moving through. But do we have the kind of considered, thoughtful analysis, weighing of the reality, weighing of the consequences, weighing of the facts before us that we need in this society to protect us and to protect the innocent? Apparently not.

We ask the government to take on this resolution, to adopt the resolution, to do the assessment and bring the responses back to this House so that we, here, can make a determination—and frankly, if there are changes that are needed in the Criminal Code, if the federal government has to take on issues, then let us present the evidence. Show us the failings in the Criminal Code, and I would not be surprised if there were failings, based on evidence and make the political argument.

I agree with the member from Welland. There are people who are quite dangerous who need to be contained. I grew up in the east end of Hamilton. The good, working-class area had some people in it who were pretty rough—some of the kids who went to school with me, one of whom I last heard was in Millhaven for having been a major, large-scale cocaine dealer, and I have to tell you, as a child I could have predicted that. There are people who are, in fact, not particularly rehabilitatable. There are people, in fact, who should be set aside in this society.

When you have a system of evaluating those who have been arrested and deciding who can be released because they aren't a threat and those who should be held because they are a threat, it appears to the public and it appears to me and it appears to many members of this Legislature that that system is failing. When this opposition comes forward and says, "You've got a problem. You should be examining it. You should be doing a detailed assessment of whether or not this system is holding up properly so that you can make a decision," then they're acting responsibly. I'd call on the government to act responsibly as well.

The Attorney General talked about the support he has given to initiatives at the federal level, which is all well and good, but here is an area where he doesn't have to advocate to another level of government. He has the power in his hands. He can make the decision. He can set the policies. He can make sure that you have people hired

as justices of the peace who have the legal training. Those who don't perform well can be weeded out. All these things are in his hands.

There are times when it's useful to go to the federal government to say, "Look, you have a problem here. You have to act." But too often it's a great excuse for doing nothing when in fact the power is in your hands—the power to make a difference, to address issues that people in this province are deeply concerned about, the power to, from time to time, ensure that someone is not getting bail because they shouldn't be getting bail, and the power to ensure that those who have been picked up on matters that are fairly minor, where there is no threat to the public, are not held for multiple days in jail.

I want to make one last point: The minister talked about two for one, and that people who had time served in a facility shouldn't get double credit for that time on a pretrial basis. When you talk to defence lawyers who have gone into the Don jail, where you have three prisoners to a cell, one of whom sleeps on the floor, whose choice is to have their head at the toilet end or the bar end where the light comes in, you have, to be kind, a Dickensian situation. It is no wonder that any judge who goes in and sees that says, "Anyone who's served time here should get a lot of credit for it because these conditions are intolerable, unsupportable." When you have at the one end that kind of treatment of people who may well be innocent, and at the other the lack of caution and prudence dealing with those who may well be very dangerous, then you have to say, "You have a system that needs to be re-examined."

I call on everyone in this House to support this resolution.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on this motion. First and foremost, let me express my utmost sympathy and condolences to the families and friends of every single victim to a senseless crime, the types we have witnessed in the last few days here in Toronto. I think we all collectively agree that there is no justification of such taking away of life, and our hearts, thoughts and sympathies go to the families and their friends. That's why it's extremely important that we discuss this motion and its impact on our judicial system.

1720

I speak today as a member of this House, obviously, as a lawyer and as a member of my community in Ottawa, which is a large urban metropolitan area. I think we all know that the bail system, as created in Canada, is created at the federal level. That's the first thing you're taught in law school when you're trying to learn between the various jurisdictions and sections 91 and 92 of the Constitution Act. The law around the system, the substantive provisions as to the principal standards to be used, are all dictated or written down in the Criminal Code, which is within the sphere of the House of Commons federally in Ottawa. The case law that emanates is

also within the purview of the federal government. So we have to be very careful as to what that bail system comprises. The substantive law, the procedures which are outlined, are not something which we, through this Legislature, can tinker with or alter. Of course, we have to be mindful that we ensure that we enforce the law in a manner that is effective, that provides for public security and community security.

That's why, for me, one of the most important things that I think the majority of us in this House agree we should be striving towards is the banning of handguns. To me, it absolutely has not yet made sense as to why in our society, in this day and age, we allow handguns. They are used to kill people. We've seen killing after killing in which handguns have been used, and we need to make sure that those handguns are banned.

But community safety is a collective effort. We will be debating on Thursday a private member's bill that I have tabled in this House, Bill 106, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, which talks about closing properties that have been used for illegal purposes, such as gang houses, crack houses, booze cans and marijuana grow-ops. I urge all members in this House to support that bill so that we can clean up illegal properties and illegal activities in our communities and neighbourhoods to make sure that our community, Ontario, is a safe place to live.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm pleased today to join this debate today in support of the leader of the official opposition's motion to the Premier with respect to bail and the process surrounding bail here in the province of Ontario.

We've heard from some people who have legal experience—lawyers—and that's great and that's important. I'm not a lawyer, but I do talk to people on the street. One of the first things they ask, and one of the first things they're concerned about is—they shake their heads when they listen to the news in the evening or read the papers in the morning and there's a story about a person out on bail with a record as a violent offender committing murder. It sends shudders down their spines, because it can't help but undermine the confidence we should all have in the legal and justice system. But it also puts them in a state of fear, because if you as a member of the public expect that the justice system is there to protect you from violent criminals, and then you read about those violent criminals not only being out and free on bail but committing murder while they're out on bail, you ask yourself, "Who is really protecting us, the members of the public?" That's a fair commentary. That's why whether the Attorney General wants to agree to the leader of the opposition's motion here is not really the relevant fact. We're quite certain they're not going to support this motion. But I don't think he can stand there and deny that the system surrounding bail and the release of violent prisoners in this province is not functioning—certainly not functioning properly; in fact, not functioning at all, probably.

The government will get up and talk or there'll be stories about a raid, a big day, guns and gangs, 60 arrests. I was listening to a news report a couple of weeks ago where they did a big guns-and-gangs sting several months ago. Not one of the people arrested is currently in custody; not one. That's the big news story: "Let's get a lot of arrests; we'll can get guns off of the street." But the reality is that as soon as those criminals are released, the guns are back on the street. They resupply. It's not about guns; it's about people. That's the problem. The bail system is about dealing with people and criminals, and it is not functioning. Until the system does function properly, we're going to continue to have repeat incidents such as the one we're talking about today. We're not speaking about the specifics, but we all know what has driven this debate and the reason for this motion. We're going to hear about more of these until the system that deals with violent offenders and their release on bail is dealt with and fixed. That's what the public inquiry would get to the bottom of. That's why I'm supporting this motion, and I know we have other members of this party who wish to speak on it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. David Zimmer: I want to speak to this. I want to pick up on something that the member for Toronto—Danforth, Peter Tabuns, referred to. He said that the key to this thing is setting up the bail system so that there's an opportunity to do that thoughtful, careful analysis to get that bail decision right.

I just want to speak for a moment about how the system actually works. I'm probably the only member here who's actually worked in the bail courts. I've worked as a crown attorney in bail courts in Brampton and Peel and old city hall here in Toronto, albeit 15 years ago. But those are two of the busiest jurisdictions in Canada. Here's what my experience has been. You're dealing with complicated facts surrounding a crime. You're dealing with victims' rights. You're dealing with the protection of the public. You're dealing with the rights of the accused. You've got very skilled and sophisticated defence lawyers, very skilled and sophisticated prosecutors and a very skilled and sophisticated judiciary. The common interest that they all have, in my experience, is to get the bail decision right. Getting the bail decision right is a balancing act: the victim's rights, the accused's rights and society's rights. In my experience—

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's excuses.

Mr. David Zimmer: This is a serious debate. Why don't you listen to what I'm saying? We're talking about victims' rights.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would ask the member to make his remarks directly to the Chair, and I would ask all members of the House to allow him to make those remarks.

Mr. David Zimmer: All of those parties in that process are trying to do their best. They're trying to get the right decision. They're doing that in the context of hundreds, indeed thousands of cases a week there. My

experience has been that the vast majority, the overwhelming majority of the decisions, getting that bail decision right—whether it's to release, whether it's to detain, whether it's to protect the public, whether it's to exercise some discretion one way or another—they get it right. Sure, from time to time in all of those hundreds and thousands of cases in a busy, busy jurisdiction like Peel or downtown Toronto, something falls between the cracks. But the solution here is to give those parties the resources that they need, the training resources—more justices of the peace, more crown attorneys, adequately fund the defence lawyers in the legal aid plan who are doing all of this work—so that all of those conscientious parties to that bail decision are best resourced to get the decision right. We don't need a public inquiry here; what we need are more resources. I call on the federal government to step up to the plate and help us provide funding for those resources, so that all of those parties to that bail decision can get the decision right.

1730

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a pleasure to speak on the opposition day motion. I just want to be on the record first as saying that I would be in support of the motion for all the reasons that have been stated. But why I have a particular, deliberate interest is, some months ago—in fact, over the last year or more, the domestic violence issue has engaged me in a general sense across the province with the Lori Dupont Act and the inquest there. I did try to work from the point of view of victims' rights, I guess, and then the right to get a restraining order. That's what my private member's bill, Bill 10, the Lori Dupont Act, is all about.

In speaking with the family, I felt immediately the sense of the victim's perspective. In fact, there had been other reasons to suspect that the perpetrator, the offender, had threatened Ms. Dupont, and it ultimately ended up, tragically, in her death. It's in that case, even as Mr. Runciman was speaking today, that I thought of the mother and her daughter being victimized. If there's some evidence that the person who perpetrated this act had prior convictions and offences proven in some process or court, how could they possibly be on the street?

That's what this is about. It's about the victims' voices being heard in the justice system, and the Attorney General responding to it. In fact, if you look at statistics on bail, which is one of the issues being covered today, the public accounts statistics on that issue are open to the public in Canada, the actual events of bail violations. The people out on bail who have bail violations is increasing. In 2003, in Canada, it was 101,100; in 2006, 106,000—people on bail who are actually off committing another offence. In Ontario, in 2003, it was 35,000, and 400 people re-offended when on bail or at least were charged again; in 2006, it was 37,000. Clearly, crowns and others in this justice system need to focus on the balance that we've heard discussed today.

I would expect that most members would support this because it's an open review. In my notes, as far back as

2004-05, I can tell you that our platform called for this whole thing of visiting the prohibition on violations of people on bail and breaching bail, and that has been debated in this Legislature several times since I've been here. So I expect members would support this opposition day motion and give the Attorney General some real powers to move forward and modify the justice system so it addresses the rights of victims.

With that, I'll relinquish the floor.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Guelph.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I, too, would like to express my sympathy to families of some of these crimes recently, which have been extraordinarily senseless and very disturbing, obviously, not just to the families but to all of the citizens of Ontario, and to assure listeners that in fact we very seriously take our responsibility to try and make Ontario a safe place for its citizens.

One of the things that is inevitably confusing, especially to those of us who are not lawyers—and I'm not a lawyer—is the way in which the jurisdiction is divvied up between the province and the federal government. Clearly, the federal government is responsible for setting the criminal law, for setting out bail requirements and protocols, for setting out sentencing requirements and protocols. What the province is responsible for is policing, corrections and the administration of the courts. In those areas where we are responsible, we have made some significant changes. We recognize that there is a backlog in the courts. We have hired more crown attorneys, more judges and justices of the peace. We have hired more probation and parole officers on the corrections side. We have provided funding for police forces to hire more police officers. So we are doing our part. In those areas where we can make application, for example, in making application for dangerous offender status, we have done more of those than any other previous government.

But there are still some areas where the feds clearly set the rules and set the protocols. I'd like to speak briefly about sentencing, because I was for a while the parliamentary assistant in Community Safety and Correctional Services. One thing that is problematic is this business of giving double or triple credit for time spent in jail awaiting trial. In my part of the world, unlike what the member from Toronto—Danforth was describing, there is a new jail at Maplehurst. If you are in detention awaiting trial, you're in one wing. When you move to the other wing, if you have been sentenced and convicted, you're simply moving within a building from one wing to another. Nevertheless, the sentencing practice continues to be that judges are giving double or triple credit for the days spent. That's not something that we can fix; that's something we need to have the federal government fix. We've made representations, and I hope that in fact they will listen to that in the future, so that when people are convicted and sentenced, they do serve more of the term to which they have been sentenced.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I am the final speaker from the official opposition to speak in support of this motion today, and I have to say at the outset that I am very proud that the leader of the official opposition has persisted in bringing this matter forward. Public safety, as the member from Welland has indicated, is probably one of the most important things that we have to deal with as legislators in this place, and it is really a shame that it was necessary to bring an opposition day motion forward in order to provoke any kind of debate on this topic.

Meanwhile, public confidence in our justice system is eroding quickly, and this has very serious implications because, of course, our rule of law depends upon the effectiveness of our justice system. My colleague the member from Haldimand-Norfolk quite rightly pointed out in his comments that the Caledonia situation is a situation where the rule of law has been seriously threatened over the past two and a half years, and that situation has continued unabated even up to the present time. Yet time and time again, every time we persist in bringing this matter before this Legislature, all we hear from the members opposite is their concern that we need to pressure the federal government to either ban handguns or to change the bail system. But with respect, that's not what this debate is about. This debate is about what this provincial government, the McGuinty government, can and should be doing to make sure that our justice system functions effectively.

The catalyst, of course, for this debate arises out of the violent sexual assaults and deaths of two innocent women in the security of their own home. The person who was accused of these assaults and murders had been released previously pending trial on six counts, including two counts of aggravated sexual assault. But, of course, we're not here to discuss the merits of this particular case, because this matter is before the courts, nor do we want to place the blame, quite frankly, on any one person or judge. And again, the member from Welland quite rightly pointed out that we have an excellent bench here in Ontario. Their credentials could not be challenged and I wouldn't challenge them. I believe we have an excellent bench here in Ontario.

However, there is clearly a systemic problem with our bail system here in Ontario that needs to be addressed, yet it hasn't been, to date. But the problem here is that we don't even know the nature and extent of the problem. How can the Attorney General continue to say that he wants to work with our justice partners to improve the system when he doesn't even know what the problem is? We don't keep statistics regarding bail violations and repeat offences committed by people out on bail, which is inconceivable to most people. This is a government that keeps track of the number of eggs laid in Ontario, but they're not keeping these important judicial statistics.

1740

The argument has been made that we can't keep these statistics because it will threaten judicial independence, but we're not talking about that. When our leader brought forward the Truth and Transparency in the Justice

System Act in December 2006, what we were talking about was changing the Courts of Justice Act in order to keep general records of what is happening in the courts and where the problems are so that they can be addressed. How could we possibly start trying to fix a problem when we can't even articulate what that problem is?

I would say that when this bill was voted down by the government, we lost an opportunity there to do something concrete in order to fix our justice system, but something has to be done now. This is an opportunity for this government to take the necessary steps to commence this inquiry to find out what's wrong because, if this situation continues, quite clearly we're going to have a situation where our rule of law is going to completely break down. If that happens, there are going to be dire consequences for this province.

I implore the government members to reconsider their position on this bill. Please support it. Please do what you need to do to find out what the problem is so that we can collectively work on a solution. People in Ontario expect us to do that: to work together to find a solution.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? I recognize the member for Oakville.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Let me start by expressing my own condolences, and I think any member of the House would express those condolences to any family that's been touched by violent crime or by the types of actions we witnessed over the weekend. It makes you think, as an individual who has grown up—I'm now 53, but I grew up during most of my early days in Canada, and you really wonder: Have guns and violence become much more prevalent in our society? Have they become more acceptable in our society? Are they something that we choose to accept or that we hear more and more about? Is it just that the information is there, or are we finding out about the crime?

I spend a lot of time talking to the chief of police and the police association in Oakville, in the region of Halton. We've got a fantastic police association there who are very quick to provide information to you as—you would know this, Speaker—a member of this Legislature who needs that type of information. I've always found the police association to be a good group of reasonable people you can go to and you can get that information. The chief of police and the other members of the Halton Regional Police Service provide that information as well.

Lately, they've been talking much more about the gang issue. It used to be that in Oakville you didn't hear about gangs. Gangs were something that happened in the urban setting, or perhaps you heard more about them in the rural setting. But as populations have grown, as we've seen the effects of urban sprawl, we've watched that crime start to creep into our own community. I don't want to come across as a bleeding heart, because I've got absolutely no sympathy for anybody who uses a gun in the commission of a crime or even carries a gun. I just have no time for that. That's not a part of what I think is a reasonable human being who belongs in our society.

But sometimes you see things that happen, as we've seen on the weekend, and yet, when you look at the crime stats in Ontario, they're the lowest in Canada. When you look at the crime stats, you also find that places that you think are safe are actually among the least safe in Canada. I think, as a case in point, that Victoria, BC, which I've always thought of as a quaint little community where grandmothers may go and drink English tea in the afternoon, actually has a very high crime rate. So sometimes the stats and the information you receive through the media are not exactly up to date.

We put 1,000 police officers on the street, we've got more crown attorneys, more judges, justices of the peace, more parole officers, probation officers, and you really have to wonder where the guns are coming from. How do we stem those guns? I think we need a multi-faceted approach to this, but clearly it's an issue that perhaps calls for more action. The last thing that I think we need to do at this point in time, despite the member's bringing it forward, I think, with the best of intentions and bringing an important issue to this House, is to have a gabfest and sit around and have a public inquiry—perhaps some more action, perhaps some improvements, but certainly it's a time for action and not a time for talk.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? I recognize the Minister of Tourism.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I, too, am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this motion today. I had an opportunity to speak to the original motion last week with some concern, but I am pleased today to be able to join with my colleagues in definitely passing on our condolences to those families who have been impacted by violence in their lives in our communities. Be it in their own homes or out on a Saturday night, I think we're all shocked to hear of the level of violence in some of these circumstances. I think it's very important that we address these things, and certainly the McGuinty government has been addressing them over the last five years.

I was pleased to note that the member for Whitby-Oshawa now joins with me in seeing that discussing specific cases is inappropriate in this House, in this Legislature, and that in fact they did change their motion to talk about a broader topic of discussion. But again, I wish the members opposite would take up this issue with their federal brethren.

I am encouraged by the fact that Ontario continues to have the lowest crime rate of any province in Canada, and I think it's important that we not lose sight of that. I am also encouraged by our government's position in pushing the federal government for a stronger bail system. We pushed the federal government to set out in the Criminal Code of Canada the availability and procedures for accused persons to seek bail, and we've made changes to those provisions. We pushed the federal government to bring in reverse-onus bail provisions for serious gun crimes, and we were successful in that. We pushed the federal government to bring in more mandatory sentences for those who use guns in crimes, and we were successful in that.

We've also asked the federal government to limit any sentencing credit for pre-trial custody to a maximum ratio of 1.5 to 1 generally and a maximum ratio of one to one when the accused has been detained due to a prior criminal record or for having violated a bail condition. We will continue to press the federal government to strengthen the Youth Criminal Justice Act to protect our communities from youth who need to be kept in custody.

But we have been tough on crime, and as a government we have made unprecedented investments in fighting gun crime in particular and supporting anti-violence strategies across the province. We've put more than 1,000 police officers on the street, and of that I am very proud. We have a comprehensive four-point plan to stop the proliferation of gun-related crime. This plan includes tougher, more effective laws relating to firearms, including calling on the federal government to bring in a national handgun ban. Again, I take this opportunity to ask members on the other side of the House to join with us in this request of their federal brethren and see to it that we do limit the number of handguns out on the streets.

We also have anti-gun-smuggling measures to prevent the flow of illegal guns across the Canada-United States borders. We have requested this a number of times from our federal cousins, and again it falls on deaf ears. I know that as the members opposite are so committed to this particular issue, they will be taking this up with their federal cousins.

We are also looking for the strengthening of law enforcement. As I said, we have put 1,000 police officers on the street. We would like to see our federal counterparts come to the fore and meet the obligations and commitments that they've made.

I would quote the Canadian Police Association president, who noted that public safety—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Please take your seat.

I would ask the members of the House to refrain from heckling the Minister of Tourism so that I can hear her.

I return to the Minister of Tourism.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I actually couldn't hear myself speak because of the member from Ottawa. It's awfully nice when you can manage to contain it somewhat.

I was trying to quote the Canadian Police Association president, who stated:

"Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day has fumbled the ball and failed to deliver on a key government commitment.... We have been waiting two years for this minister to deliver on the Prime Minister's promise, and we are disappointed by the short-sighted and inadequate response."

This from the Canadian Police Association on the need for more municipal police officers—failure on the part of the federal government to provide that kind of leadership.

Again, I'd like to just reiterate our government's commitment to safety and to the safe well-being of our citizens across the province. I note again with some optimism that we do maintain our status as the province with the least amount of violence, but it is something that we have to continue to work on as we see these violent incidents erupting in our communities of late. It is of deep concern to us that all people in the province feel safe, be they in our rural settings or in our municipal settings.

I know that it was with the greatest of intentions that the member for Leeds–Grenville brought forward this motion, but I would agree with my colleague who sits behind me that in fact this is not a time for more talk; it is a time for action. I would ask that the members opposite turn to their federal cousins and ask for some action on this file and join with us in encouraging the federal government to take more action with respect to our bail system, with respect to gun violence, in our province and across the country.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this motion today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The time for this debate has expired. Mr. Runciman has moved opposition day number 3:

"Whereas the alarming number of murders and other violent crimes allegedly committed by violent criminals who were out on bail for other alleged violent crimes in Ontario raises Ontarians' fears for their safety and shakes the public's confidence in the administration of justice in Ontario; and

"Whereas the issue of violent crimes alleged to have been committed by people out on bail when they should have been behind bars based on their past criminal behaviour is a serious public safety problem that the McGuinty government has failed to address since being first elected in 2003;

"The Legislature of Ontario calls on the McGuinty government to call a public inquiry into Ontario's bail system."

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1751 to 1801.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Mr. Runciman has moved opposition day number 3. All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time.

Ayes

Bailey, Robert
Barrett, Toby
Elliott, Christine
Gélinas, France
Hudak, Tim
Klees, Frank

Kormos, Peter
MacLeod, Lisa
Miller, Norm
Murdoch, Bill
O'Toole, John
Runciman, Robert W.

Scott, Laurie
Sterling, Norman W.
Wilson, Jim
Yakubski, John

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): All those opposed to the motion will please rise.

Nays

Albanese, Laura
Balkissoon, Bas
Bartolucci, Rick
Brown, Michael A.
Carroll, Aileen
Colle, Mike
Craitor, Kim
Crozier, Bruce
Delaney, Bob
Dickson, Joe
Duncan, Dwight
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Hoy, Pat
Jaczek, Helena

Jeffrey, Linda
Kular, Kuldip
Kwinter, Monte
Lalonde, Jean-Marc
Mangat, Amrit
Mauro, Bill
McMeekin, Ted
McNeely, Phil
Meilleur, Madeleine
Mitchell, Carol
Moridi, Reza
Naqvi, Yasir
Pendergast, Leeanna
Phillips, Gerry

Qaadri, Shafiq
Ramal, Khalil
Rinaldi, Lou
Ruprecht, Tony
Sandals, Liz
Smith, Monique
Smitherman, George
Sorbara, Greg
Takhar, Harinder S.
Van Bommel, Maria
Watson, Jim
Wilkinson, John
Zimmer, David

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 16; the nays are 41.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being past 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1804.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Steve Peters

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

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Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
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Arthurs, Wayne (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (LIB)	London West / London-Ouest	Attorney General / Procureur général
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough–Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / Ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Broten, Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Brown, Michael A. (LIB)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development / Ministre du Développement économique
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
		Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
		Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Carroll, Hon. / L'hon. M. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	Minister of Culture / Ministre de la Culture
		Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
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		Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
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Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough–Centre	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
		Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
		Minister of Revenue / Ministre du Revenu

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Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby—Oshawa	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (LIB)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora—Rainy River	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législativ
Hoy, Pat (LIB)	Chatham—Kent—Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West—Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest—Glanbrook	
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges—Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (LIB)	Brampton—Springdale	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (NDP)	Welland	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Kular, Kuldip (LIB)	Bramalea—Gore—Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean—Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga—Brampton South / Mississauga—Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity—Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Mathews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough— Westdale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa—Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Carol (LIB)	Huron—Bruce	
Moridi, Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	
Munro, Julia (PC)	York—Simcoe	
Murdoch, Bill (IND)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	
Naqvi, Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
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Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pendergast, Leeanna (LIB)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (LIB)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (LIB)	Scarborough—Agincourt	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres
		Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches—East York	Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de parti reconnu
Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of International Trade and Investment / Ministre du Commerce international et de l'Investissement
Qadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Ramal, Khalil (LIB)	London—Fanshawe	
Ramsay, David (LIB)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland—Quinte West	
Runciman, Robert W. (PC)	Leeds—Grenville	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Ruprecht, Tony (LIB)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Monique M. (LIB)	Nipissing	Minister of Tourism / Ministre du Tourisme
		Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Deputy Premier / Vice-premier ministre
		Minister of Energy and Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Énergie et de l'Infrastructure
Sorbara, Greg (LIB)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton—Mississippi Mills	
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga—Erindale	Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services / Ministre des Petites Entreprises et des Services aux consommateurs
Van Bommel, Maria (LIB)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	
Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (LIB)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Wilkinson, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Perth—Wellington	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
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Zimmer, David (LIB)	Willowdale	

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Kim Craiton, Gerry Martiniuk
Paul Miller, Bill Murdoch
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Cheri DiNovo, Helena Jaczek
Dave Levac, Shafiq Qaadri
Khalil Ramal, Laurie Scott
Peter Shurman
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Chair / Président: Greg Sorbara
Howard Hampton, Greg Sorbara
Norman W. Sterling, David Zimmer
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First Session, 39th Parliament

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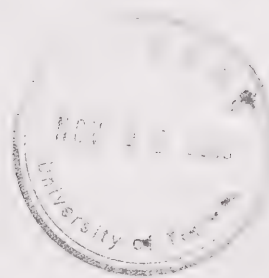
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Wednesday 29 October 2008

Mercredi 29 octobre 2008



Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 29 October 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 29 octobre 2008

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a Sikh prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET MEASURES AND INTERIM APPROPRIATION ACT, 2008 (NO. 2)

LOI DE 2008 SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES ET L'AFFECTATION ANTICIPÉE DE CRÉDITS (NO 2)

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 28, 2008, on the motion for second reading of Bill 114, An Act respecting Budget measures, interim appropriations and other matters, to amend the Ottawa Congress Centre Act and to enact the Ontario Capital Growth Corporation Act, 2008 / Projet de loi 114, Loi concernant les mesures budgétaires, l'affectation anticipée de crédits et d'autres questions, modifiant la Loi sur le Centre des congrès d'Ottawa et édictant la Loi de 2008 sur la Société ontarienne de financement de la croissance.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate? The member for London—Fanshawe.

Applause.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: When the opposition claps for you, it's a good day.

I was listening to many speakers, during the last two or three weeks, speaking about the economy, which I think is the most important topic these days. You cannot turn the TV on without listening to people from across the globe talking about the economy, talking about the crisis we are in. When you turn the radio on, you listen to many people talk about the economy and concerned about the economy: economists, presidents, governments, people, investors, seniors. Across the globe these days, the most important topic people are concerned about is the economy.

I've been listening to many speakers from both sides of the House, and I know the opposition is trying to blame the government and the government blames past governments and sometimes blames the federal government. But the most important thing—

Mr. Peter Kormos: Bill 114, Khalil.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm talking about Bill 114. I'm talking about our initiatives as a government in order to—

Mr. Peter Kormos: Where is that in the bill? Which schedule? Tell me.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Order.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Mr. Speaker, it's important to stand up in this place and remind people. Bill 114 is an important bill. It's brought by the Minister of Finance in order to protect our investors and investment in this community. It's important to talk about many different issues: what our government was doing in the past to make sure we have strong economic foundations in order to support our economy, to support our seniors, and to help, through many different initiatives, the elements of our community, our society and our economy to keep performing well.

Since we got elected in 2003, and recently in 2007, we have taken different initiatives in order to support our economy. I can speak about our plan to maintain our infrastructure and maintain our ability to perform well. Cutting business taxes for big corporations and big companies that want to come and invest in the province of Ontario—we have heard the Conservatives say many different times that we don't cut enough taxes to persuade many companies to remain in this province, but we are doing so.

We cannot forget about our infrastructure. We have to maintain the infrastructure across Ontario, and we have to continue to support our municipalities in this province. As you know, our infrastructure is getting old and needs a lot of renovation and rebuilding. That's why we had a great announcement not too long ago. The Premier made this announcement at the AMO conference in Ottawa: \$1.1 billion to support municipalities across Ontario to enable them to maintain their infrastructure—roads, highways, bridges and many different elements of their infrastructure.

Also, to support innovation and research—as you know, we cannot prosper in this province in this day and age without supporting innovative ideas, especially when you want to attract companies and manufacturers, and companies want to partner with universities and colleges to bring good and important ideas to maintain business and to maintain our prosperity for our next generations. It cannot be done without going back to the fundamental basis on which our future, our economy, and our research and innovation relies.

I was talking the other day to a couple of people who are concerned about the economy in this province. They

told me that every once in a while, every 25 years, we invent something and we benefit from that invention for almost 25 years. Different communities and different nations across the globe try to imitate our invention and do the same thing and compete with us on the same level, maybe even better sometimes due to their population numbers or their geographical distances, or due to many different elements. What we have to do is again create different ideas and try to benefit from those new ideas in the future for ourselves and also for our future generations.

It's also important to continue partnering with small business and business across the province, to convince those businesses to maintain their business in Ontario, and also to try to partner with them and invest if we can. I will give you an example. I come from London, Ontario, London-Fanshawe. We have great companies there. We have Diamond Aircraft. We, as a government, went to this company many different times. We partnered with this company. We give them the tools they needed in order to grow and hire more people. We invested more than \$10 million at low interest rates. This company hired more than 300 people to work there. We went further. We invested money in the college to prepare skilled people to work at this company. These were all steps toward maintaining business in Ontario, to help manufacturers stay in this province and give them the tools and the support they need to maintain their ability to compete nationally and internationally.

Also, we cannot forget about skills, about investing in our people. It's important these days to continue our ability to invest in our people, whom we badly need in order to face the future and the technological era, and to compete in national and international markets. That's why we have our training centres, colleges and universities across the province opening their doors to students to come and get the training they need and to retrain if they have lost their jobs.

Bill 114 talks about many different elements too. It talks about support for seniors: tax credits for the people who want to accommodate their grandmother or senior living with them. This bill would allow tax exemptions if they want to add a room or whatever to their home in order to accommodate seniors who are living with them. Speaking of helping seniors, we increased the threshold from \$23,090 to \$24,300. I think that is a good threshold to allow seniors living on modest incomes to be able to save some money.

It's important also to reach out to mineral companies with a tax exemption for a company that wants to expand and open in Ontario. This bill gives us the ability to allow more of them to open, and we expand this tax exemption to gravel pits and also limestone companies if they want to open and explore their inventions and their companies here in Ontario.

0910

This bill also talks about the cigarette tax. As you know, these days many people go to many different spots in Ontario and try to buy illegal cigarettes. So our gov-

ernment is coming forward with a plan to monitor the machinery and the manufacturing of the machinery which produces the cigarettes, and is also talking about the seizure of contraband tobacco, because it's very important to protect our small businesses across the province. As you know, many small businesses, especially convenience stores, came to us as a government and complained about contraband tobacco.

Therefore, I think Bill 114 is an initiative, a step, towards strengthening our economy. That's why I'm supporting it. I hope all the people on both sides of the House will support it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Shurman: It's always interesting listening to my friend from London-Fanshawe, particularly because he is so passionate in almost everything he says and, in this particular case, because he has highlighted a list of things which he terms important—and indeed they are. But he begins by discussing what's happening elsewhere in the world economically and not focusing on what's happening in Ontario when in fact what we have here under discussion is a deficit that was made in Ontario and not made anywhere else in the world.

Our party, and indeed, beyond the partisan party politics area, professionals in the field of economics have been forecasting that this would happen for the past year, year and a half, you could even say two years. While there is certainly an effect on Ontario, as there is everywhere, of economic events in the rest of the world, there is a reason why most economic indicators in Canada show that we are dead last. There are nine other provinces in this country that operate in the same environment. So why is it particular to Ontario that we have a government that has acted like chemists and taken a \$6-billion surplus and turned it into a deficit, a deficit of \$500 million that is being forecast, when the Toronto-Dominion Bank says no, this is not going to be \$500 million; it might be closer to \$5 billion in deficit by the time all is said and done? I think you have to focus on that before you talk about all of the good things that you believe the government has done. I think there is an awful lot more to do. I think it could have started a year or a year and a half ago, even earlier than that, in order to face this economic storm we are in. It's going to take us a long time to get out of it.

The deficit is forecast. That one number will wind up being another number, and time will prove me right.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: We face a substantial crisis globally in credit markets, and the expectation is that we will face very rough times in what all of us refer to as the real economy, a place where people really do work. This government has not had a plan in the time since it was elected in 2003, and it does not have a plan now as we face extraordinarily tough times. It has not had a plan to develop the economy of this province. It does not have an approach that will in fact put people in a place where

they can deal with this crisis, put people in a place where they can survive this crisis with dignity, with employment and with futures for their children—the kinds of futures that they want.

We went through a debate here in this chamber over the last few weeks about the economy of the province as a whole. I've heard speakers from the government side talk about their five-point plan. What was extraordinary to me was that they were talking about a five-point plan that they had in place, that they were executing, and essentially saying that things were fine in the province, things were wonderful, they had things under control. Yet the simple reality is that hundreds of thousands of people have lost their jobs in manufacturing, many face huge uncertainty right now and, essentially, we have a government that comes forward, a failed five-point plan on the back burner and a budget bill that does nothing, says nothing, about how we will advance, how we will deal with the economic downturn that is coming before us.

One thing I will note, though, is that the hiring of nurses has been pushed back. I will speak more about that when I get a chance to debate, but frankly, in tough times you don't make sure that people who are sick pay the highest price.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I find myself agreeing with the member from the NDP—

Hon. James J. Bradley: That's dangerous.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Yes, it's a little scary, says the man who is banning cellphones in Ontario and taking credit for all of John O'Toole's work.

Interjections.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Well, I noticed you gave him credit on a very quiet basis—on a one-to-one basis—but during the press release—

Interjections.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Oh, in public? My apologies to the member from St. Catharines if he did that in public. Apparently, the fourth estate did not report that in their—but they're like that. They wouldn't give credit to a Conservative when it was due. But what were we talking about? Oh, we're talking about Bill 114, making deficits okay.

We live in very scary times. This government hasn't had a financial plan for the province of Ontario, to carry the province over a very difficult time. Of course, during good times, which we've had for the past three, four, five, six years—during those good times you prepare yourself for the bad times. This government hasn't done that. Now we're entering the bad times, and those bad times will be very, very bad. I believe personally that they'll be as bad as the 1930s.

This is a number that people are not paying attention to: There's \$681 trillion in jeopardy in the United States—\$681 trillion. I don't know how big that number is. I know it's bigger than any number that I can imagine. But that's the economic problem that the United States

finds itself in. Economists in the United States say it's really only \$56 trillion. That's another number I don't know the meaning of. Ontario is not prepared for this coming recession—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Kormos: I tell you, I like the member for London-Fanshawe. I always find it a delight to be here in the chamber when he speaks, or if I'm not here in the chamber but in my office, I'll turn up the volume on my television.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: No, because he's very effective and I find that he comes to this chamber with some real-life experience and narrates it in a very useful style. Which is why, for the life of me, I don't understand why the government whip restricts him to 10 or 11 minutes of a 20-minute speaking spot. I know that the member for London-Fanshawe is more than capable of filling a 20-minute speaking slot and, like his constituents, I have concern about why he would be censored in this very oblique manner that the government offices appear to censor him—by restricting in an artificial way the amount of time that he is able to speak. Having been re-elected handily in London-Fanshawe, clearly having the support of the community, I as well find it somewhat amazing that he's not been chosen to be part of the cabinet table. The member from London-Fanshawe is humble, but he has every skill that would be required for a cabinet minister. And for the life of me, I can't understand why the Premier would have such disdain for him that (1) the Premier's office not only cuts short his speaking opportunities but (2) slams the cabinet door in his face. I tell you, I don't agree many times from an ideological perspective with what the member from London-Fanshawe says, but I find him a valuable player. I only wish the Premier's office shared my view of him.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for London-Fanshawe, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I thank everyone who spoke and gave comments on my speech. I want to tell the member opposite that we are not here to ignore the economic situation in the province of Ontario. That's why the Premier stood up in his place and spoke about the economic situation, and spoke out how we are facing some challenges. Also, the Prime Minister, I guess yesterday or today, has called all the Premiers to meet and discuss the economic situation.

0920

The member from Danforth spoke about our members speaking about everything except the economy, and talking about many different things but not our crisis. No doubt about it, in the situation we're facing in Ontario we're not alone. All the provinces have the same problem. Every nation around the globe is facing some kind of economic circumstances and crisis. I think it takes both sides—the opposition and government sides—working together in order to get out of this crisis. I believe

strongly that only when we work together are we able to solve our problems.

I'm not here to defend any circumstances. I know we are facing an economic crisis. We're facing some challenges, especially in the auto industry. We heard them yesterday. They came to the provincial and federal governments for almost a billion dollars' support in order to maintain the most important element of our economy in this province, which is the auto industry. Hopefully, the Prime Minister and the Premiers from all the provinces will come together with some kind of financial package to support our economy and our business in this province.

Also, I thank the member from Niagara Centre, I believe, for his confidence in me. He knows we get equal time among—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett: As we debate this budget bill, we do that with the knowledge that the government that brought forward this legislation, this budget, is also the same government that put us in this mess in the first place, and I'm referring to the last five years of over-the-top spending that has brought the once-powerful Ontario fiscal engine—it has pretty well ground to a stop.

In this morning's debate, as we consider the sad state of affairs of this McGuinty government's tax-and-spend spree, I ask members of this Legislature to consider a well-known parable. When I think of the last five years of McGuinty government economic mismanagement, I think of the parable of the ants and the grasshoppers. And it commences:

In a field one summer's day in Ontario, the grasshoppers were hopping about and chirping and singing to their hearts' content. In contrast, the ants marched by, bearing, with great toil, the kernels of corn that they were taking back to their nest for the winter. And the grasshoppers asked, "Why are you ants toiling and moiling in that way?"

"We are working. We are helping to lay up food for the winter," said the ants, "and recommend that you do the same."

"Why bother about winter?" said the grasshoppers. "We have plenty of food at present. Times have been good."

But the ants went on their way and continued their toil. When winter came, the grasshoppers had no food and found themselves dying of hunger while they saw the ants distributing every day corn and grain from the stores that they had collected in the summer. For you see, the grasshoppers had spent, they had consumed all and they had nothing in reserve—nothing in reserve. And I just heard some chirping across the way.

Well, folks, this is what I see that we have today with respect to the present Ontario economy in a McGuinty world. No worries, however.

There is more to the parable, though. The grasshoppers decided that they were entitled to some of that corn, being hungry and all, and to deny them food was a

moral failing on the part of the ants, whose greed was so loathsome that it should be punished by those who respected social justice. So the grasshoppers complained loudly to government leaders about their terrible inequity with respect to food redistribution.

If these ants were in Ohio, they would probably complain to Obama.

And that is when the state, ever compassionate and wise, stepped in, confiscated all the food and divided it out fairly and evenly among all of God's creatures, with a few exceptions: save for the bits they kept for themselves, of course, and save for those who had especially helped them to power, all of whom received extra rations for being kind of more equal than others. Granted, not a soul died that winter, neither an ant nor a grasshopper, although they all became very, very weak and very vulnerable. That's the price that you pay.

What the grasshoppers didn't realize, you understand, is that it is best to prepare for the days of necessity. Perhaps grasshoppers and ants don't understand this, but those in this House, we all understand that economies go in cycles. The good times do not last forever. And people in my riding find it unconscionable that at the end of five years of prosperity this government went right into a deficit.

Obviously, taxing and spending and consuming in the good times leaves nothing for the tough times, and that's exactly where this government stands today. If I may, all the grasshoppers opposite have been complacently sitting back, resting on their political laurels with no prudence, no thought for the days to come. While the grasshoppers in this parable eventually learn, out of necessity, the importance of preparation, I am not confident that the Ontario McGuinty government grasshoppers will ever admit this. It's not as if they weren't warned about the coming tough times, the looming economic crisis—and these warnings arose, certainly, from the banks over the past year, the last several years. Do we need warnings anyway? We all know that economies go in cycles. Warnings from the official opposition; warnings from the third party; economists, banks told you; even your own advisers told you what was about to happen and what may come in the future. I'm uncertain whether your disregard for these warnings—was it sheer arrogance? Was it negligence? Was it incompetence, perhaps? All of the above.

I do ask people to take a look at that spending over five years—spending that skyrocketed from \$68 billion a year to \$96 billion a year. Where did that money go? Did it disappear? We have some indication of what the money was spent on. For example, my colleague Jim Wilson outlined recently \$6 million to remove the C from the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. logo. So there's \$6 million out of what is now a budget of \$96 billion. And \$2.3 million was spent on a reception at Caesars Windsor casino. This was the opening reception.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I didn't get an invitation.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I didn't get an invitation. As I recall, at the beginning of the McGuinty term there was

another reception at a casino down the Niagara way. Did that cost \$2.3 million? I don't know. With respect to that Caesars Windsor casino, \$400 million was spent on renovations—for a casino. Gambling money obviously wasn't enough to support this place. Another \$2 million was spent on an incomplete report on youth violence and \$600,000 was spent in the courts to fight parents who have autistic children. Now, those are just a few examples, a very small total of the spending that occurred over five years, where we saw the provincial budget go from \$68 billion a year to \$96 billion a year, even though we were getting those warning signs—warning signs from the banks, warning signs from the opposition for some time now that tough times were coming.

0930

However, these happy-go-lucky grasshoppers, these devil-make-care grasshoppers, these “What, me worry?” grasshoppers, were too busy spending the ants' hard-earned money, the ants' tax dollars, to listen. Even the ants started to question, “Why should we be moining and toiling and dragging corn back to be redistributed? Why should we work overtime? Why should we strive to expand our anthill? Why should we strive to get ahead?” knowing that at least half their corn was going to the grasshoppers, who were sitting back over the summer living the life of Riley.

Last week—this is now well known—the McGuinty government announced a half-billion-dollar deficit. That's a \$500-million deficit. But the warnings were there. We all knew that only seven months ago this provincial ledger showed \$5.6 billion in excess revenue, and \$800 million at that time was indicated to be in reserve. What happened? All that money has disappeared.

Remember the grasshoppers: Grasshoppers cannot run deficits; grasshoppers starve.

Despite five years of prosperity, we now have this made-in-Ontario deficit. The shortfall is resulting from what works out to a 50% increase in program spending. It results from the largest tax increase in the history of Ontario; even then, not enough money at the end of five years to balance the books. We're in trouble as well, in part, because of the creation of more government jobs than all the other provinces combined. Dalton McGuinty has increased the size of the civil service by more than all the other provinces put together, and the number of Ontario civil servants making more than \$100,000 is now up by 27%.

This deficit is a clear indication that McGuinty is a poor steward of the public purse—no prudence in evidence here. We're considering a budget bill introduced by the same government that put us in the hole in the first place. Truly, Dalton McGuinty—Dalton the grasshopper, if you will—has eliminated Ontario's economic advantage, has left all of us now weak and vulnerable to the global economic challenges that I heard one of the Liberal members talking about earlier.

I predict that this budget bill will only lead us further into Mr. McGuinty's economic abyss. In fact, the TD Bank has indicated that this government will continue to

run deficits; it won't be just in the coming months. They predict deficits as large as \$4 billion, as large as \$5 billion. That's going right back to the born-again-Liberal Bob Rae days.

I don't think a lot of people in my riding and throughout our area in southern Ontario made an awful lot of money in the last five years when the stock market was being artificially revved up by that easy money, that summer money. I do worry that if this government does not get its act together, people in my riding—and again I think of farmers, truckers, industrial workers and small business people—are going to get kicked in the teeth. I think of the people in my riding who have already been kicked in the teeth: the cattlemen, the horticultural producers, the tobacco growers, of course, and the young farmers in my riding getting into cattle, hort and particularly hog production. I think of people living in Caledonia and throughout Haldimand county and Brantford. They're pretty well at the end of their rope, and for the last several years, certainly two and a half years in Caledonia and Haldimand, have already been kicked in their teeth. Oral surgery is required, and I'm sad to say that you are not going to see it in this particular budget. Who will be there to do it? There's really little hope for the next three years at any rate.

We know that while the deficit is a number, that number goes beyond just a \$500-million figure that puts us in the hole. That number represents fewer nurses, less money for cities, less money for farmers, less money for education—fewer school repairs, for example—less money for health care, let alone health promotion, and fewer dollars to help young people at risk. In the long run it means we'll all be paying higher taxes to pay off that debt; that's something that our children and grandchildren can look forward to.

We know that we have a finance minister who recently suggested to the media, two weeks ago, that the upcoming economic statement would be printed in red ink. For me that generates a lot of concern about our finance minister's ability, let alone his willingness, to roll up his sleeves and try and address these economic times after five years of neglect. Deficits should always be the last resort, not the first choice. With signs of clouds on the horizon—actually beyond the horizon—and now clouds over top of the province of Ontario, what is the immediate answer? Run a deficit.

Seven months ago this government stressed that to achieve a balanced budget, they'd be looking for a billion dollars in savings and efficiencies. This raises questions. We to date see no evidence of those savings, we see no evidence of those efficiencies. Another question: Are the wheels truly falling off this Ontario economy? And what evidence do we have that this government, now that they've got us into this pickle, is attempting to do something about it? Both the Bank of Montreal and the Bank of Nova Scotia are predicting a recession—not only in Ontario, but right across Canada. Ontario's real gross domestic product declined 0.3% in the first quarter of this year, 2008. That followed a mere 0.1% increase in the fourth quarter of last year, 2007.

People in Ontario are angry. They're angry about this government's economic mess. In the last fiscal year, revenues, as I indicated, were \$5.6 billion higher than expected, but instead of saving for a rainy day, as the ants do, this government spent every single penny. "Why bother about winter?" said the grasshoppers. "We've got plenty of food and present times have been good. Let's just get more tax revenue from the ants, and spend it as we see fit." And so it was.

In 2004, Premier McGuinty introduced the largest tax increase in the history of Ontario—and he ran up a deficit. This government commenced their regime with a deficit and we're now back into a deficit. We know that revenues went from \$69 billion to that whopping figure of \$97 billion, and this government spent it as quickly as it came in. Spending increased by close to 50% over those five years, and this crew thought the good times would last forever. Now here comes the bill; here's the tab. This most recent deficit announcement means that Dalton McGuinty has increased our total debt now by a total of \$31 billion since he came into office. That works out to something like \$6,500 in extra debt for every household in Ontario. Five years of overspending, five years of overtaxing and year-end spending sprees—combine these and you have a province of Ontario that has been weakened. We have become very vulnerable. The money's been spent. Those who received the money will not be returning any of that money to this government. Even though we had five relatively good years, nothing was salted away—no thought at all for the rainy days.

Oh, you grasshoppers on the other side of the Legislature, it's sad, really. But as they say, the horse has bolted. This government, the people opposite—they do need advice, they do need help. We put out an offer for hearings by a dedicated select committee to meet as soon as possible to draw in expertise from ordinary people out there as well as the experts—of course we would ask economists and representatives of the banks to come forward. That was voted down by the devil-may-care grasshoppers who do not really fully appreciate the fact that winter is upon us.

0940

Sadly, the budget bill we're debating today is only one more proof that, as badly as this government needs it, they turn deaf ears to prudent thought and carry on like happy grasshoppers, taxing and spending. Has this government played politics with the looming economic crisis? That's the question. I feel that they have. If they haven't, I wish they would at least admit that they weren't playing politics, and that they were essentially careless and, at best, inept.

You know, in June, John Tory, the PC leader—

Hon. David Caplan: Who?

Mr. Toby Barrett: —John Tory demanded an emergency debate on the economy. He also asked—

Hon. David Caplan: Where is he?

Mr. Toby Barrett: Where is that economic debate? What happened to the select committee? What happened?

What else did he ask for? He asked for an immediate economic update. Where is it? He asked for a financial update. Where is the financial update? We got something that may pass for a financial update. We got an announcement about a deficit—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The strategy of dealing with cost containment by deferring the hiring of nurses is a fundamental error on the part of this government. You can talk to people in the nursing sector—Linda Haslam-Stroud, head of the Ontario Nurses' Association; Lesley Bell, the CEO there; Doris Grinspun at the RNAO—and the simple reality is that in our hospitals today we do not have enough nurses to cover the workload.

When I was out canvassing in the last election, I met a nurse at the door who was desperate for some relief in her unit. She was in a situation where she felt compelled to provide support, but couldn't do things like take lunches and breaks and get the rest she needed. My sister is a nurse. She works in the GTA, north of Toronto. Recently she sent me an e-mail saying, "Sorry I wasn't able to call you. I had to work through lunch, work through my breaks and then do my charts at the end of my shift because I didn't have time to do that during the day."

When you look at what is happening in our hospitals; when you talk to our constituents who wait for hour after hour in emergency rooms, or who find, when they're in a ward, that they have to wait extended periods for someone to come and attend to them; when you talk to family members who spend lots of time in hospitals because they know that nurses are overextended and can't come to the aid of patients, then you recognize those realities, both from personal stories but also from the fact that this government has said, "We need to hire more nurses." They recognize the need. They recognize that hospitals need them, that the sick people—any of us here who could be in hospital today or tomorrow—need more nursing care. To defer that puts people at risk. It is false economy. Because if people are not attended to early, the chance of developing deeper, more complicated problems grows dramatically. So this government has made a fundamental error in this area, among all the others it has made.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: It's a pleasure to enter this debate, and specifically to respond to some of the comments by our colleague from Haldimand—Norfolk.

If we weren't facing such an important global financial crisis, it might almost be amusing to hear a member who was here during the years of the Mike Harris and Ernie Eves Conservative governments lecture us on prudence. This was a government that accumulated a \$5.6-billion deficit, which our government tackled exceptionally well in the first few years of its mandate.

Interjections.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I am no grasshopper; I am the elected representative of the good people of Oak Ridges—

Markham, and in the last week I have been busy consulting with the residents of my riding. In particular, I had the opportunity to meet with the Richmond Hill Chamber of Commerce at breakfast last Friday morning, and of course the topic of discussion was the Minister of Finance's economic statement and our government's five-point plan. I can tell you that the first thing those members of that chamber of commerce said to me was, "Please maintain your infrastructure commitments. We need that, particularly in York region. This is an excellent investment in our infrastructure. It'll provide short-term jobs and it will obviously give us ongoing investments in infrastructure." The subway to Richmond Hill is another priority for them. In fact, what I heard was real commitment from them to support us in our prudent management of the economy. I can simply say to the members of the two opposing parties that I'm convinced that we have embarked on an excellent course.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: The lesson of the parable of the grasshoppers and the ants was very good and very appropriate for this debate. The member mentioned that there was a party for the opening of the new Windsor casino, and that \$2.3 million was spent on that party. I don't know how you spend \$2.3 million on a party. I didn't receive an invitation; none of my colleagues here on this side of the House received an invitation. I wonder if anybody watching on the legislative channel received invitations to this \$2.3-million party. All of southern Ontario must have been invited, to spend that much money at one simple party. I dare say that the people watching probably didn't get invitations to this party, but I'll bet you that a lot of Liberals in southwestern Ontario got invitations to the party. There was no stone left unturned when it came to making this an opulent party.

It reminds me of a time when the Liberals had an event down in Niagara-on-the-Lake. They trucked the ice in from Toronto, and the bill for the ice was over \$1,000; it might have been \$1,800. There was ice supply locally that they could have had, but they didn't care about that. They cared about an ice supplier who was a friend of a friend, or someone else. They didn't care that they were spending taxpayers' dollars. When you don't care about spending taxpayers' dollars, things become very, very extravagant. That's why the grasshoppers and the ants are so appropriate: The grasshoppers don't care if they spend someone else's money. That's what has happened to this government over here.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Shurman: The parable about grasshoppers and ants is interesting. Last winter, a number of people I know, myself included, who invest some of their savings in the stock market, realized that something was amiss. It was predictable, as was the situation that has now gripped the world. Given the fact that there's planning involved, some of us were smart enough to ensure that part of our savings were liquidated, so that when the tough

times hit and losses were racked up on paper, we could look at them and say, "You know, over the course of a year, two years or three years, these will turn around and our savings will be our savings again. We don't have to liquidate." Not so the government of Ontario, and hence the parable of the grasshopper and the ant having resonance with me and people like myself who have planned for that rainy day.

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The main thing here is that a budget has to be seen as what it is, which is a plan. In this particular case what we've got is a plan, as my friend has pointed out, that is something we can look back at having been tabled in March, and by June we knew it would not be achieved. So what have we got? We've got the plan followed by a statement that was issued last week that said, "Correct, the plan is not going to be achieved. So here's what's going to happen. We're going to miss it by \$500 million"—in fact, by over \$1 billion, if you take a look at the use of reserve funds—"and at the end of the year we'll rack up a deficit of \$500 million," which remains to be seen. We won't know that for six or eight months.

So when it comes to planning, this government's record is not particularly good. I found it interesting that at the same time as we were hearing from the finance minister here, our colleagues in the Liberal government in the province of British Columbia were doing the appropriate thing for their people and providing the appropriate tax measures to address their problems.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Haldimand-Norfolk, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I appreciate the feedback from the members for Toronto-Danforth, Halton, Thornhill and Oak Ridges-Markham. I wasn't referring to the member for Oak Ridges-Markham personally as being a grasshopper or an elected grasshopper, but I do wish to make the point that we can learn from these parables and we can learn from the past. Look at the people in Ontario. People in my area this time of year are putting away firewood. In fact, given the economic storm clouds, I notice my firewood pile is larger than it's ever been and I see that with my neighbours. People out there know. Not all the wisdom resides within the hallowed halls of this monumental edifice.

We can learn from the recent past, and those indications were put forward to this government by the third party, by the opposition, by the banks, by the everyday Joe who is out there. We've been warning, certainly for the past two years—not only Joe the plumber, but Joe the farmer and Joe the carpenter and Joe the hairdresser—that the high-taxing, high-spending policies will leave this province ill-prepared. We now have the economic crisis upon us, a crisis that was being dismissed by the members opposite. We saw the procrastination. I'm concerned that we still see procrastination. The member for Thornhill made very clear in his recent remarks the importance of planning. Our question remains, where is the plan, let alone, where is the action?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Governments and, more importantly, their leaders get their real tests when bad times come in. Over the last five years, this McGuinty government has stood on the sidelines while over 200,000 jobs were lost in manufacturing and over 40,000 direct and indirect jobs were lost in the forest sector. Those were seen as the good times.

This government, which has been pushed on this issue for years now by the leader of this party, Howard Hampton, constantly, regularly, did nothing, stood aside while hundreds of thousands lost their livelihood, hundreds of thousands were forced to take a substantial drop in their standard of living. When you go out and talk to auto workers in Windsor or in Oshawa, talk to people who have gone from making \$25 or \$30 an hour to making \$8, \$9 and \$10 an hour, about the kinds of wrenching adjustments that are made in their lives, they say to you, "What's happening at Queen's Park? What is it that makes us invisible? What is it that makes our crisis invisible? Why is there no action, no cohesive plan, no cohesive direction on the part of this government to take on those big issues?"

That is the situation that has prevailed in what we have referred to in this province as the good times. Now the economic storm clouds are rolling in. The Minister of Finance has been talking about how fundamentally strong the economy is in this province, and it does have many strengths. It has historically had strengths because governments have taken steps to intervene and make sure that people in this province had the opportunity to benefit from its tremendous riches and talents. If, at the beginning of the 20th century, you had not had a government that was willing to take action, set up Ontario Hydro and provide large-volume, reliable, affordable power, we would not have developed to be the industrial jurisdiction that we are. That made a huge difference and has provided power at extraordinarily low cost for decades.

The reality is that in the 1960s, when the auto pact was negotiated and trade was regulated so that there was fairness, this province benefited dramatically. We grew industrially. Government intervened; it did not let the free market simply act as it wished to determine our economic future. It's that need for activism, it's that need for a sense of where you want to take the province that's missing from this government. They're essentially a government of technocrats.

When we look at the statistics, every new statistic or report brings more bad news about job prospects for Ontario. The simple reality for us is that it's not just manufacturing and resource. In fact, to say something like, "We're getting job losses in manufacturing and resource; don't worry, the rest of the economy is fine," is to misunderstand the way Ontario works, because it's those sectors that provide the economic foundation for all that is built upon it. Now we're looking at difficulties in retail, financial services and construction.

A few weeks ago, the Premier presented a resolution in this House arguing that his so-called five-point plan was sufficient to guide Ontario through an economic downturn. He was telling us about his five-point plan—the one that the minister of economic trade was talking about so wonderfully, all the opportunities that she had to go to talk to people in the business sector around the world—talking essentially about the wonderful job that was being done. That five-point plan and this government's—I will call it "so-called"—strategy did not protect people in Ontario's manufacturing heartland or its resource heartland. Those people were left to their own devices. Unfortunately, that meant they were left in trouble, in difficulty.

What people are looking for in this province from this government is a real plan to sustain and create good jobs and, for workers who are facing layoffs, to provide better protection and fairer benefits.

Ontarians wanted to see a real poverty reduction plan. Poverty has been deepening in this province. We know that there's a real price to poverty. There's a price to the individuals who are caught in it, there's a price to the families who are sucked into it, and there's a price to the society that has to deal with the social damage that comes from it. Ontarians have wanted to see and were excited before the last election about seeing a real poverty reduction plan, so that people who were facing difficult lives already would have the support, the backing of the provincial government as we went into an economic downturn.

Ontarians want to see continued investment in the public services that matter to them: hospitals, so that if they get sick or members of their family get sick, they know with some assurance that they'll be taken care of expeditiously, they'll be taken care of with the care that they need and deserve; education, so that our children have the training to take on the jobs that they're going to be working at tomorrow, so that they have the education to make full use of their talent and skills, because when I talk to people, so many people in this community, in this province, they know that a good education is the key to their children having a future that's going to matter; and municipal infrastructure. When I talk to people who have had their suspension done in by huge potholes on roads, who look at the state of municipal infrastructure across this province, they are worried. They are worried about the scope of the need that is there and the lack of action on it.

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So this fall economic statement was an opportunity for this government to come forward with a real plan, accomplish the goals that need to be accomplished to make sure this province functions well and put Ontario on a better path. But in fact, the statement took an entirely different course. It didn't deliver a plan to create or sustain jobs; it took a hands-off approach, a technocratic approach. Fundamentally, this government, if it understands what's going on, doesn't feel that it can do anything or does not want to do anything.

In the course of the economic statement, in the course of the speech made by the Minister of Finance, the word "poverty" was not mentioned once, and the economic statement made it clear that there are many public services that will be on the chopping block soon. Rather than implementing a real plan, rather than looking strategically at the resources, opportunities and talents that Ontario has, looking at what we can build on to actually put people to work and hold our own in this economic storm, the government stuck with a do-nothing, hands-off approach; again, said to the people of this province, "You're on your own. It's all yours. Good luck." These are the times, when the storm hits, when workers and their families need their government the most to be there for them, to sustain jobs, and ensure the services that they need.

By failing to bring forward a real plan, by failing to step in when people expected the government to step in, this government has abandoned the people of this province. The McGuinty Liberals failed in the good times, and it's clear that they're on track to fail in the difficult times.

Our party, New Democrats, have been putting forward a real plan and substantial recommendations for years. Our plan would assist the manufacturing and resource sectors and would have prevented massive job losses that have devastated many communities across this province. Manufacturing and resource sector workers in this province have been witnessing a recession for years now; a worldwide financial crisis coupled with a provincial government on the wrong track will only make things worse. They know the economies in their communities have not been, as the finance minister has said, fundamentally strong. Since July 2004, almost 230,000 Ontarians in the manufacturing sector have lost their jobs.

Here are some examples: 430 jobs, 80% of its workforce, at DDM Plastics in Tillsonburg; in Niagara, in the last month, 800 jobs are lost in John Deere in Welland and a temporary layoff of another 480 at AbitibiBowater; since June 2004, 100,000 manufacturing jobs lost in Toronto, 25,000 in Hamilton and almost half of Thunder Bay's manufacturing jobs.

I was in Thunder Bay in September and had an opportunity to talk to a man who runs a company making hydraulics. That company has found a niche market in Canada, in North America, and frankly, in the Asia-Pacific basin. They're in a position to expand because what they make is highly specialized. The market isn't a big market, but it's a strong market. And when they've approached this government in the past for assistance to expand, they've been told, "You don't fit into any program we have." So if, in fact, a pro-market government can't help businesses that have a product that is in demand, that satisfies a niche market, that in fact in some ways is protected from mass marketing or mass production in China because they make custom hydraulic products, then what are the chances that this government will actually assist other manufacturing to take on their challenges and actually fulfill their opportunities? It's

extraordinarily frustrating to see that productive economic enterprise, productive businesses with good markets, can't get assistance from this government.

Some 230,000 jobs have been lost in manufacturing, and more than 9,000 direct jobs in forest products and about 35,000 indirect jobs tied to them have been lost. I shouldn't have to tell people opposite the value of these jobs. They're not just important because, on average, they pay \$2.50 an hour more than the average hourly wage in this province; they're important because they also come with good pensions and good benefits. For many people, the loss of dental protection, prescription protection, protection for other things like eyeglasses and hearing aids, is of great consequence to their families. So, in the protection of manufacturing jobs, we have to think not only about the whole question of wages, we have to think about the overall level of social support that people get.

Loss of those jobs is a huge problem for us and one that needs to be addressed vigorously by this government and one that this government seems to have decided is a side issue—collateral damage, an unfortunate series of events that no one could actually have done anything about. When you pretend, when you say, that these job losses are limited to manufacturing and forestry and think that there's another Ontario economy that somehow floats independently in the air aside from these jobs, you misunderstand this province.

Second-quarter economic accounts released by the Minister of Finance last month show that output from the manufacturing sector continues to decline. Exports declined 2.5%, particularly in the automotive, industrial goods, and materials sectors. The simple reality is that the American economy is in free fall and things are expected to get worse. When you combine the reports from the first two quarters of this year, it becomes clear that the rest of the economy is no longer picking up the slack. There aren't extra jobs floating around out there that people can simply move to. So we're declining or seeing declining output in a variety of sectors of the economy.

Retail, finance and construction are all facing trouble. Stats Canada released a report on retail trade last week that showed a decline in retail sales in Canada by 0.3%, and that could mean real job losses.

The US credit crunch is creating higher mortgage costs in Canada, and when combined with higher unemployment and lower incomes, declines in residential construction are on the horizon. The Emerging Trends in Real Estate 2009 report states: "Less volatile Canadian real estate markets cannot avoid shock waves emanating from the big elephant in the room next door." That's bad news for our construction sector, which employs 400,000 workers. Stock market declines and the collapse of international banking institutions are likely to lead to layoffs and the hiring of fewer people in the financial sector.

I want to speak for a moment about that crisis and the deregulated approach to finance that has caused trouble around the world, caused the crash in the United States, caused huge problems in Iceland. Iceland deregulated its

banks a few years ago, and those banks are now in a situation where Britain has seized their assets because they aren't paying out to their customers—looking at IMF support. You're looking at nations all over Europe that are having to pump in hundreds of billions or trillions because they tied in to a deregulated American financial structure that allowed people to play wildly with money, to create financial instruments that more and more were vapourware, rather than reflecting real value. An agenda of deregulation that allows that kind of economic playground to be set up at the expense of the real economy and the real people in this country and on this planet has shown itself to fail before—less dramatically with the savings and loan crunch in the 1980s in the United States, and very dramatically in the 1920s and 1930s, a time that we are all praying we will not be repeating. But a lot was learned in those crunches: that deregulation was a huge error, because for a while it allows illusory growth and illusory gains in financial markets, but in the end all it's doing is building a huge castle of cards. We need to have in this province an approach to regulation that protects people because in the end it protects the economy as well.

I raised a question a few months ago about deregulation in the natural gas industry in this province—looser rules by the Ontario Energy Board that essentially allowed a company in southwestern Ontario, owned by a company in Texas, to increase the money they took out of this economy through payments for gas storage. Now, I know it sounds kind of esoteric, but \$100 million is going to flow out of Ontario's economy and go to a company in Texas that under previous, stricter energy board rules would have stayed here and stayed in the pockets of customers.

We in this province need to understand that regulation in the public interest is a good thing, and that arguments that are always made by sharp-dressed financiers, who say that these regulations are hemming them in and are cramping their style—the people making those arguments and advocating for those changes set things up for us that most commonly end in tears. We learned a lot in the 1930s; a whole system of regulation was brought in in the United States and the rest of the industrialized world. A lot of that was cleared out in the last decade and we're paying a price for it. We here in Ontario are paying a price for deregulating energy and for increasing privatization of our energy system because that will lead to substantially higher prices and undermine the rebuilding of our industry.

This government has to seriously rethink and go back to basics. What does Ontario need to prosper? It needs regulation, it needs the energy price advantage that brought industry here in the first place and it needs activist government that will create markets for goods so that people can be put back to work.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 8(a), this House is in recess until 10:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1013 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am delighted to welcome Dr. James Wilkes and Diana Collins to the Legislature, as Dr. Wilkes is winning the Stand Up for Kids award this afternoon for his work on child protection. Welcome.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I'm delighted to have two constituents visiting today: Mrs. Judy Nafziger from Milverton, who's with the real estate agents visiting today, as well as Ed Verkley, a chicken farmer from the Atwood area, who is here with the Chicken Farmers of Ontario. Welcome to the Legislature.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I'd like to welcome Chantal Adams and Brian Graham, who are here from the North Bay Real Estate Board, and we're excited to have them here with us today.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'm delighted to welcome Natalia Adams from the wonderful riding of Parkdale-High Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound and page Laura Sawka, I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome her mother, Mary, her dad, Barry and her brother, David. They'll be sitting in the west members' gallery. Welcome to Queen's Park.

I would also like to take this opportunity—we have with us today in the Speaker's gallery a delegation of visiting public officials from Pärnu county, Estonia, led by Mr. Toomas Kivimägi, the governor of Pärnu county, and accompanied today by the Honorary Consul General of Estonia, Mr. Laas Leivat, and guests.

Please join me in welcoming our guests to Queen's Park today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

VIOLENT CRIME

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is for the Attorney General. He knows, like I indicated to him yesterday, that we on this side of the House have reviewed the transcript of the bail hearing for Mr. Nathaniel O'Brien, who is the individual charged with the senseless murder of two women in their Scarborough home.

We've expressed concern about the crown's failure to appeal the judge's decision to release Mr. O'Brien into that quiet residential neighbourhood. That bail hearing occurred April 30, 2008. Minister, have you reviewed the transcripts and are you satisfied with the performance of the crown at the hearing?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I thank the member for the question. As the member knows, I can't comment on the specifics because there is an ongoing matter before the courts and to comment may actually endanger the very prosecution that is undergoing and may actually undermine public safety. I understand that is frustrating

for people in the community. It is sometimes frustrating for those who would ask questions. Let's be clear about the principles: The crown acts and the police act to protect the public safety and act in the public interest on the basis of the facts and the law that applies in every single case. We will continue and always do so.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I hope that people who observe these proceedings were listening to the question. I asked the Attorney General if he's satisfied with the performance of the crown in a bail hearing. I didn't ask him for specifics of the case. I asked him if he had reviewed the transcript and was satisfied with the performance of the crown. The bail hearing occurred April 30, 2008, almost half a year ago. The murders occurred over two weeks ago. The minister knows, as we all do in this place, that there's significant public outrage over the justice system that you are responsible for, a system that released a man linked by DNA evidence to two violent sexual assaults into an unsuspecting residential neighbourhood.

Minister, you're telling us, the victims' families and the public at large that you haven't even reviewed the performance of your own employees in their role in that release. Is that what you're telling the public today?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Clearly, what I've said is that I can't comment and won't comment on the specifics. The public rightly ask questions whenever there are tragedies. As well as expressing our sympathy, we ask what further can be done, what changes should be made, and how we make sure that tragedies don't happen in the future.

We've done a number of things with respect to bail. We've moved to make sure, over the past five years, that in serious crimes, the crown takes the position that public safety is paramount, and we start from the position of opposing bail. We've worked with the police to make sure the best information gets before justices of the peace and judges, and drawing on our front-line experience, the police and the crown, we've moved for changes in federal bail laws. We will continue to take positions to protect the public interest.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Regrettably, the Attorney General continues to use cop-out language. Specifics? I'm not asking for specifics. Minister, we know there's a publication ban on the bail hearing proceedings, and we strongly agree with the need to protect the identity of the victims. What we don't agree with is protecting the other players in this drama, specifically the judge, the crown and the defence lawyer. I can't speak to specifics—I'm not going to—but we are very concerned, even alarmed, at what went on at that hearing.

Minister, would you consent to asking the court to lift the publication ban, save and except for keeping the victims' names private? Will you do that?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I must always act in the protection of the public and in the protection of the ad-

ministration of justice. There is an ongoing prosecution, and undermining and endangering rights in the prosecution is not something that I will do.

But let us be clear: We have done, and will continue to do, everything appropriate in the circumstances to protect the public interest. That's why we've been working with the police; that's why we place public safety as a paramount consideration; that's why, drawing on police and crown front-line experience, we've toughened laws for those charged with serious gun crimes, both bail and sentencing; and that's why we'll continue to make whatever improvements and changes are necessary to protect the public interest.

VIOLENT CRIME

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I guess a lot of words could be used to describe that response. "Depressing" would be one that comes quickly to mind.

My second question to the Attorney General is talking about bail. The Attorney General frequently gets on his feet and talks about, "We always oppose bail in certain crimes—violent crimes, gun crime."

I want to know what "oppose" means. What's the definition of "oppose"? Is this just a perfunctory—a kind of indifferent public relations exercise? What specific direction has he given crowns when it comes to opposing bail?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The crown policy manual speaks to this at some length. It says that we always begin from the public interest perspective and always begin from the perspective that public safety is paramount. We make sure that wherever we can, we oppose bail to make sure that the public safety is protected. We are bound by the facts of cases and we are bound by the law, but we take the position and the protection of the public seriously. It is reflected in the crown policy manual, and it's reflected in comments made by my predecessor and by myself on numerous occasions in many different fora.

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The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: In a lot of ways, this is a useless exercise. We're certainly not getting any meaningful responses.

In Murray Campbell's column today in the *Globe and Mail*, he reminds us of Mr. Bryant's pledge—your predecessor, Mr. Bryant—to work "with the laws that we have" to fight case by case for stiffer sentences." That clearly didn't happen in the O'Brien bail hearing or in the 2006 trial of Kyle Weese, the accused killer of Bailey Zaveda this past weekend.

Why, Minister, haven't you required the crown to request electronic monitoring, to prosecute bail breaches, to appeal bad bail decisions, to bring 810 applications? The tools are there, but under your so-called leadership, they're not being used. Why not?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Minister Bryant was absolutely right; that's what we've done for the past five

years. We prosecute case by case. Our job is to make sure the public safety is protected, and it's protected when the guilty are convicted and sentenced for the harm that they have done.

Drawing on front-line police experience and crown experience, my predecessor Michael Bryant pushed for changes in the laws that govern cases: tougher laws for those charged, bail and sentencing with serious gun crimes. So we continue to prosecute cases to the fullest extent that the facts and the law allow, and they bind us all, and we will continue to use whatever tools are available where we can use them to protect the public interest.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Two women were brutally attacked, murdered by a stranger. Their alleged attacker was allowed back on to the streets by the justice system in this province. What message does that send to victims, who deserve nothing more than the full protection of the law that you're responsible for administering, Minister? What message does it send in terms of the sexual assault allegations to individuals who have been sexually assaulted in this province?

Your failure, your crown's failure, to appeal that bail decision tells women, "Don't bother coming forward, because the justice system won't be there to protect you and every other innocent woman in this province." You have a duty to change that message. A public inquiry would address that. You turned that down yesterday. Why did you and your colleagues reject a public inquiry into this very, very harmful situation?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I say to every community member who is justifiably determined, angry and outraged at tragedy that we will continue to do whatever it takes to protect the public safety.

For those things within our control, we have moved over the past five years, in terms of working with the police for more police, guns-and-gangs initiatives, tough positions on the bail hearings when they are within our control, tough positions with our federal counterparts—whatever the party—to change the laws. But we are absolutely determined to protect the public interest. That is why I don't comment on the specifics of cases, because we protect the public interest through prosecutions that convict the guilty—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

VIOLENT CRIME

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Attorney General. I want to follow on the questions that the Leader of the Opposition has just presented.

I'm sure the Attorney General knows that people across Ontario are particularly upset when they see an innocent young woman who's a bystander shot and murdered on the streets by someone who has already been convicted of gun crimes.

My question is this: It was only a couple of years ago that the former Attorney General of the McGuinty gov-

ernment said, "Working with the laws that we have, we're arming our prosecutors with the legal ammunition that we think will make a real difference in getting stiffer sentences for gun crime. We want to send a message to the streets that gun violence won't be tolerated."

Can you tell us what happened with that message from the former Attorney General, given the occurrences of the last few days?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: To the families and all members of the community, our sympathies are there. We are justifiably all outraged at tragedies when they occur and we're determined to make sure we do whatever needs to be done to make sure they don't happen in the future. My predecessor was absolutely right. We take every case and send a very strong message that violence, gun violence, serious violence is not tolerable. We prosecute in the public interest. We take tough positions where the facts and the law permit us, and we move to change the laws where our front-line experience tells us they're not tough enough. Nobody should have to suffer the tragedies that have been suffered. We'll do whatever it takes to deal with it.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: Well, these are fine words from the McGuinty government Attorney General, but people have heard these fine words from the McGuinty government before. I want to again quote the former Attorney General: "What we're going to put before the courts is evidence on the extent of gun crime and the number of guns that are on the streets of Toronto. This will be used as a tool to help us have the court consider how serious this problem is. We believe that it's going to help us get tougher sentences for gun crimes." He said the information would be used to assess all gun crime matters, including bail hearings, in an effort to stop what police say is a revolving door at the courthouse. It would seem from the events of the past week or so that these words were not acted upon. We heard them, but they don't seem to be acted upon. Can you explain how that could happen?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Innocent people are dead—people my daughter's age. We're all outraged and we all want to know what can be done. We have taken a tough position on the serious crime and the gun crime; we prosecute them to the full extent of the law. The police who investigate and the crowns who prosecute have families as well. We're all working in the public interest, and where our front-line experience tells us more needs to be done, we do it: more police, Anti-Guns and Gangs Task Force, TAVIS intervention, information coming before judges, tougher laws federally. We'll continue to act with the police and our justice partners to protect the community interest.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Once again, more fine words from the McGuinty Attorney General. But again, I want to quote the former Attorney General, who said just a couple of years ago in this House, "I can assure the

member opposite that we”—the government—“will continue to have in place principles and policies that are exactly consistent with ensuring that we have safety on our streets and that people who ought to be detained are detained.” Attorneys General for the McGuinty government have said these words over and over again over the last five years, but nothing seems to have changed. How can that be? How can you continue to say the words but people continue to see innocent people being gunned down on the streets by people who should have been detained? How can that be, Attorney General, given that you and previous McGuinty government Attorneys General—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: So the crown policy manual and the direction to crowns has been supported by, among other things, 72 more crowns to target gun crimes, six new anti-gun-smuggling crowns, eight new high-risk-offender crowns, 15 additional officers for the OPP provincial weapons enforcement unit, 12 new victim services staff to support victims and work with witnesses, 12 new probation and parole officers to work with the Anti-Guns and Gangs Task Force, a dedicated major crime court, a thousand police officers. Do we need more? Yes. We need an end to the automatic two-for-one credit that lets too many people out too early when they get federal sentences. And we do need a national ban on handguns, not as the only answer but to reduce the risk. The common denominator in all gun crimes is a gun.

1050

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is to the finance minister. The finance minister will know that the Automotive Parts Manufacturers' Association of Canada is calling on the Ontario and the federal governments to provide \$1 billion in short-term loans to help them through the global liquidity crisis. It's been clear for over a month now that the auto manufacturers are suffering as a result of the lack of loan liquidity, but your economic statement last week said nothing about this. Why has the McGuinty government failed to respond to what is a dire, dire situation that could result in the loss of tens of thousands of more jobs in Ontario?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We implemented a number of plans beginning in 2004, and you voted against every one of them. Do you know what? In my most recent budget, not only did we eliminate the capital tax for manufacturers, we refunded it retroactively and got the cash into their hands. Unlike the member opposite, this government has been in constant communication with the automotive parts people: with the CAW, led by Ken Lewenza, the president of the CAW; with the Detroit Three; with Toyota; with Honda. He voted against every opportunity and he's also spoken against assisting the automotive industry.

This government will press the federal government to take its proper role. We will continue to work against people like you who have fought against help for the auto sector and the auto parts sector, and we'll continue to protect the interests of Ontario families and Ontario businesses through this extremely—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: Much bluster and bombast and no answer. Seventy-two thousand auto parts sector jobs are at stake here—and they're very clear: Everything your government has said over the last week about the Next Generation investment fund doesn't suit their needs. Everything you've just said about the capital tax doesn't suit their needs. The fact of the matter is, if these manufacturers are going to stay in business, they need short-term loans in order to finance their operations so they can then sell their product and receive the revenue. They're very clear in what they need. Everything the McGuinty government has talked about, everything you've continued to re-announce, doesn't suit their needs.

Are you going to provide them with short-term loans in exchange for job guarantees, yes or no?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the Minister of Economic Development.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Obviously, we are working very closely with the association—you're referring to the letter making the request to the federal government and the provincial government—talking, obviously, with the auto parts manufacturers. I was doing that yesterday and I'm doing that today, and I'm doing that tomorrow and the next day. I'm talking with the industry leaders as well.

We have in place in the province certain fiscal capacity which has been set aside through the advanced manufacturing loan program, through the Next Generation of Jobs Fund and through other programs. Each of those programs the member was opposed to. There is obviously also a much larger and real fiscal capacity of the federal government, and we need them to be playing a role as well. I know that the member would agree with that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I have to quote Mr. Jason Myers, president of the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters Association: “Right now ... we've got a short-term priority and that's just the survival of companies. Frankly, if we do not see government helping to provide credit to companies ... we are going to see an awful lot of very, very good and very important companies go out of business.”

None of these things that you've mentioned—the advanced manufacturing strategy, the Next Generation of Jobs strategy, your auto sector strategy—provide the short-term loans that these companies need right now to stay in business and sustain jobs; everything that you've mentioned doesn't fit the bill. I ask the question again: Is the McGuinty government going to go around blaming

someone else or are you going to come up with the short-term—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Michael Bryant: The member is just wrong. Those tools, in fact, are in place. I met with the very person you speak of. I'm meeting with leaders in the industry and the specific presidents and CEOs of these parts companies themselves. There has been recognition by management and labour that these funds that the McGuinty government established, and that you opposed, are in fact necessary for the industry to continue. Yes, there is a role for the federal government to play and we are calling for them to play it.

But let's be clear. The establishment of a grant and loan system to assist the auto industry was one that was brought forward and pioneered by Dalton McGuinty and opposed by Howard Hampton.

VIOLENT CRIME

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Again to the Attorney General: It's about yesterday's debate into our call for a public inquiry, a call that was precipitated by the senseless murders of two innocent women. Minister, during the debate, the Liberal member for Oakville said the last thing we need "is to have a gabfest and sit around and have a public inquiry."

Is that what this government considers public inquiries are all about? Is that why the victims of Dr. Charles Smith's errors wanted a public inquiry, which you called? Is that what Dudley George's family got out of the inquiry that you called? A gabfest? Your member called a public inquiry a gabfest, dealing with the murders of two innocent women.

Interjections.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: They're yelling at us; they're ridiculing us for that? Give me a break. Have some shame. My God.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: What we all want, with all the passion we can muster, is to do what we need to do to make sure that tragedies don't happen again. Chief Blair was asked, "Is an inquiry necessary?" Chief Blair said, "No."

Is an inquiry necessary? No. We get on with protecting public safety and security. My colleague from Oakville has been a determined and passionate advocate for public safety in his community. All members of this House are advocates for public safety. We are getting on with the protection of public safety.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: The man accused of the double murders of two innocent women in the sanctity of their home was released on bail when he stood accused of two violent sexual assaults. According to the charges laid, these women were beaten and brutally raped. It's public knowledge there's DNA evidence linking him to the crime. The nature and brutality of these attacks raise the possibility that Mr. O'Brien is a serial rapist, making

him a serious risk to public safety, but a judge released him, and your crown failed to appeal.

These are the types of decisions that a public inquiry can look into. Why won't you stand up for victims in this province? Why won't you fulfill your duties to make sure the system keeps them safe in their homes and on the streets?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: We stand up for those affected by tragedy every day, and that's why we are getting on with the protection of public safety. That's why we're already working with Chief Blair and the other chiefs to determine what else we need to do. Yes, we've got more police officers and different strategies such as guns and gangs. Yes, we've got some changes in federal law.

What's next? Is it the end of two-for-one credits where they automatically seem to be imposed? We believe a legislative change is necessary; we'll push for that. Is it further changes in the bail law to make sure that the dangerous, the serious, the violent and the out-of-control are in custody and not out? We believe it is.

It's not commenting, much as I might like to, on cases that are before the courts, because that would undermine the very public safety that we are all here to protect.

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CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. The minister knows very well that not all grandchildren are eligible for TCA under her new rules. Yesterday, Hamilton rally demonstrators, in an impromptu meeting with the mayor and city director of community services, all agreed there was a change to the ministry's directives. Call it interpretation, call it definition; there was a change, and the minister finally admitted in scrums yesterday there was a change in July.

When will this minister accept responsibility for these mean-spirited changes and turn her energy to the plight of these families, ensuring that duration of assistance and settled intent do not disqualify grandchildren being raised by their grandparents under temporary care assistance?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Again, I'm going to remind the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek that this is temporary care assistance, and all the grandmothers or adults who are taking care of these children and who are entitled will receive temporary care assistance.

We have increased that budget on a daily basis. These grandparents under TCA—we have over 5,000 children every year, every day, who are entitled and who benefit from this program. Within this program, they are also entitled to a dental program, to health care and to medication. We will continue to support grandmothers, but for those where it's not temporary care, there is another program that is offered—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: I guess what the minister is saying is that she has made them ineligible with her changes.

Yesterday, the minister again made an erroneous accusation. She said, referring to my party and me, that "they want the program to be income-tested." The minister needs to stop hiding behind her false accusations. She knows very well that she's the only one to suggest income testing.

Will this minister admit that her false accusations are an attempt to divert attention from her appalling attack against grandchildren being raised by their grandparents in this province?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Indeed, that's what I said, and that's what I'm going to say again today.

This member comes to see me and is complaining that some grandparents don't have substantial income to look after grandchildren. We have this program for these grandparents, but he continues to argue that it should be income-tested. He doesn't use the word, but all the examples that he's giving me—and I'm saying to him that 75% of the grandparents will not be entitled to this program if the program is income-tested. This minister and this government are not ready to move in that direction.

HOME CARE

Mrs. Laura Albanese: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Many seniors in my riding are proud homeowners and proud of the investments they have made in building a life for their families. Support for light domestic chores requiring a degree of physical stamina can sometimes make the difference for these seniors, between being able to stay in their homes and having to move into a facility. The winter season, which is fast approaching as we can see today, can present particular difficulties for the senior residents of York South–Weston.

What support is the ministry providing to seniors to help them maintain their dignity and independence and remain in their homes?

Hon. David Caplan: I want to thank the member for the question and thank her for her advocacy for seniors in York South–Weston, because our government is committed to improving the lives of Ontario seniors and their caregivers.

Our approach is about providing our most vulnerable the support they need in order to lead safe and comfortable lives. That's why we're investing \$1.1 billion over the next four years in an aging-at-home strategy that will provide seniors and caregivers with an integrated continuum of community-based services to allow them to stay healthy and live more independently in their homes.

As part of the aging-at-home strategy, we've made significant investments in community support services, the most significant, I would say, in 10 years: key services such as transportation, homemaking, meal services, supportive housing, security, home maintenance repair, foot care and many, many others that will be of great

assistance and that will provide services to your constituents in York South–Weston that they can benefit from and count on. These key services represent \$57.2 million invested—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: One of the main problems is that many seniors are not aware of the important services and supports that are available to them. Easy access to information about available health services is critical to maintaining good health, and it is important that we continue to identify ways to make it easier for seniors and their families to access this information, no matter what organization provides the support or service.

Can the minister please tell this House what the government is doing to make sure that seniors have access to this kind of information?

Hon. David Caplan: The member asks the key question. She very astutely points out that access is key. I'm proud to tell the Legislature that aging-at-home initiatives are being implemented in communities right across Ontario that will help seniors live healthy, independent lives in the comfort and dignity of their own homes and in their own communities.

There are two ways that seniors can learn about local aging-at-home initiatives in their communities. The first is by talking with some of the agencies that they deal with every day; those would be their local health care service providers and their local community care access centres. Many of the aging-at-home initiatives enhance the capacity of existing community services that help meet the needs of seniors in their own communities. Some of these agencies may also be offering new programs. If they're a client at the local community care access centre, seniors may be referred to specific aging-at-home initiatives in their communities that will enhance the quality of life in their own homes, consistent with their care needs.

Last June, local health integration networks and MPPs—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is also to the Minister of Health. Minister, four weeks ago, I called my dermatologist and I was told by his receptionist that because I hadn't seen the doctor within the last 12 months, I would be required to either get a referral letter from my family doctor or pay \$125 to make an appointment to see the specialist. I informed the receptionist that I didn't have a family doctor, so I couldn't get a referral letter, and secondly, that I was pretty sure that the \$125 fee he was asking was illegal.

I can probably afford the \$125, but I am concerned about the almost one million Ontarians who don't have a family doctor, who can't legitimately get a referral letter and who are being asked to produce their credit card

number in order to make an appointment with a specialist in this province.

Minister, do you think this is right? Do you think this is fair? Is this what your government calls open access to OHIP services?

Hon. David Caplan: The facts are these: Under my friend, as a previous health minister in this province, we saw a significant reduction in health services in Ontario. In fact, through the work of Premier McGuinty and through our colleagues here in the Legislature, we've been able to enhance health care services.

I find it remarkable that this member and his party, who advocated a \$3-billion cut to health care, would even deem to ask this question. As far as doctors, there are over 1,200 more doctors practising in Ontario today than in 2003. In fact, with the advent of family health teams, 150 of which have been implemented in the province, we are seeing over 600,000 additional Ontarians have access to front-line medical care, to have access to a primary care physician.

There's more: We're enhancing and expanding the number of—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: That is a horrible, horrible answer. I'm asking this question on behalf of the million Ontarians who don't have a family doctor and who are being asked to produce their credit cards and produce \$125. What about the lady on the fixed income in Beeton in my riding, who can't afford the \$125? No one under the Mike Harris or Eves government was ever asked to produce their credit card to see a doctor in this province. That is absolutely shameful. You did not answer my question. I want you to report back to this House how often this is happening.

I talked to the CPSO this morning and they said that they're getting complaints all the time and that your government's doing nothing about it. I gave your ministry a chance four weeks ago to give me an explanation; they never gave me an explanation. You should be ashamed that you're blocking OHIP services to people on fixed incomes, to a million Ontarians without a doctor. Shame on you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Order on both sides. Order. Minister?

Hon. David Caplan: I'm happy, of course, to look into specific examples, but I would remind the member that he brought a similar kind of passion when he closed 28 hospitals right across the province of Ontario, when they fired thousands of nurses, that saw the roots of many of the challenges that we have today, that saw, in fact, this member vote against two-tier medicine and ending those practices when we introduced the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act.

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Here is the reality of the situation that we face today: We have introduced family health teams, which have expanded the number of practitioners and expanded the

number of Ontarians who have access to front-line medical services. We are introducing nurse-practitioner-led clinics, another innovation which is going to provide Ontarians with that kind of access. In our new agreement with the Ontario Medical Association, collaboratively working with Ontario's physicians, we are finding ways—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

TRANSFER PAYMENTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. The provincial-municipal fiscal review is two years old now, and after several broken commitments, the minister has suggested the report will be coming out by Friday. My question is this: Will the minister today assure this House that the report in fact is being released this Friday?

Hon. Jim Watson: I made a commitment several weeks ago that the report would be out by the end of the month, and I'm pleased to report that we will be releasing the report on Friday. This is good news for the municipal sector, when people see the report.

We're proud of the fact that my colleague the Minister of Finance and I have worked closely and in partnership with the municipal sector. We're building on the relationship that the McGuinty government established in 2003 when we started the process of uploading public health costs, land ambulance, ODP, ODSP. We're proud of the fact that to date we've gone from approximately \$1.1 billion in uploads and taken that pressure off the municipal sector to \$2.2 billion this year alone. We've doubled the amount of support in the municipal sector. We're proud to work in partnership with the city of Toronto and AMO, and I know they look forward to the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: As the minister knows very well, the economic downturn is forcing municipalities to pay more for provincially mandated social programs like Ontario Works, diverting their limited resources away from crumbling infrastructure and other priorities. The fall economic statement failed municipalities by signalling very clearly less financial support for the municipal sector next fiscal year, the very time that they're likely going to be needing more resources with skyrocketing social program costs.

The question is this: Will the provincial-municipal fiscal review recommend an immediate down payment on provincially mandated services and commit the province to assuming full responsibility for Ontario Works by, at the very least, the fall of 2011?

Hon. Jim Watson: As you know, we have an agreement with AMO and the city of Toronto that the contents of the report are to remain confidential until we release the report. But I can tell you, on the subject of infrastructure, in the member's own riding, \$48 million from the Investing in Ontario Act is going to Hamilton.

In fact, the NDP voted against providing more money to the municipal sector. When we announced the upload of ODP and ODSP, what did the NDP do? They voted against supporting the municipal sector. Time and time again, when we've gone to bat for the municipalities, whether it's Hamilton or Toronto or North Bay or Thunder Bay, the NDP have said no to the municipal sector.

We've turned the page on downloading and disrespect for the municipal sector. We look forward to working with them in partnership in the years ahead.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I have a question for the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, in light of the transportation question regarding roadkills that was asked last week, what is the percentage of increase of roadkills in the Thunder Bay area? I'm sure the members would like to know how many roadkills are taking place in the Thunder Bay area, as the Minister of Transportation had that question come to him last week. We would certainly like to know that on behalf of the hunting and fishing community in northern Ontario.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I thank the member for the question. I'm presuming the member is asking a question about collisions with wild animals on roads. Is that the correct question? As you know, in the Thunder Bay area there aren't as many. The collisions that we're most concerned about are those occurring in eastern Ontario, where out of every two collisions, one is with a wild animal. What we did was that we put in place, with the Minister of Transportation and the OPP as well, a program to raise awareness around speeding and the issue of the deer. As you know as a hunter, this is rutting season, so the challenge is that the deer are virtually everywhere.

That said, this is something we need to continue to work on very diligently because it is an education issue, along with the drivers and the animals themselves. We have two programs in place: one with the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: The intention of the question, Minister, is that there is a large concern with the tag allocation in the province of Ontario. If there's an increase in the number of incidents whereby animals are being hit by vehicles—and certainly the public is concerned, as are the OPP, insurance companies etc.—the public at large would like to see an increase in the tag allocations in those areas that are seeing a significant increase in the roadkills of animals. I'm wondering if you can enlighten us as to what the tag allocation increase or decrease is in those areas.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: Depending on which particular unit, they have actually increased some of the tags for deer. As you know, the moose tag review is under way, but again, those moose tag allocations are based on the counts done the previous year. That said, your point

is well taken. If in fact there's significant roadkill that might impact those numbers, I'm more than prepared to undertake a review that would look at whether there is a correlation between roadkill and the number of allocations.

The issue around the deer and moose tags, as you know, is a contentious one and has been for some time. I have met people who say they have been looking for an allocation for 30 years and have yet to receive one. That's why we are undertaking the allocation. But I will do both: I will look at whether or not there is a correlation between the two.

ACCES AUX SOINS DE SANTE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones. Le gouvernement propose la création d'un comité de services en français pour les réseaux locaux d'intégration des services de santé, les RLIS. Comme la ministre le sait, ce projet de règlement est inacceptable aux yeux de la communauté francophone.

À titre de ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones, comment est-ce que la ministre entend défendre et appuyer la communauté francophone?

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: C'est une excellente question. Oui, il y a beaucoup de préoccupations dans la communauté francophone concernant les règlements qui découlent des réseaux de santé. C'est pour cela que nous avons des consultations présentement. J'ai rencontré les groupes qui m'ont parlé de leurs préoccupations. Alors, les consultations se terminent le 12 novembre prochain et nous avons l'intention, le ministre de la Santé et moi, de revoir les commentaires des gens et faire suite à leurs commentaires.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: La ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones a reçu plusieurs communications de l'Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario et de l'Alliance des réseaux ontariens de santé en français. Ces groupes ont dit clairement que le gouvernement a ignoré les recommandations de la communauté francophone quand ils ont proposé des comités aviseurs de services de santé en français pour les RLIS.

Est-ce que la ministre est d'accord que la formule d'un comité consultatif de services de santé en français ne permet pas à la communauté francophone de s'engager adéquatement avec les RLIS?

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Je voudrais réitérer mon engagement envers la communauté francophone. Ça fait partie de mes fonctions d'être leur porte-parole et de défendre leurs droits. Alors, on a déjà eu des discussions. Il y a un comité aviseur sur la santé, un comité aviseur au ministère. J'ai mon propre comité aviseur et on nous envoie des commentaires. J'apprécie beaucoup et j'accueille avec beaucoup d'intérêt les commentaires de la communauté francophone, et nous allons les prendre en considération sérieusement lors de la fin des consultations.

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HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Bill Murdoch: My question is to the Minister of Health. As the Minister of Health will know, the previous Minister of Health was very dedicated to a project in our area, the Markdale hospital. What I would like this minister to tell the House and the people in Markdale today is: Is he as dedicated to building this hospital as the previous minister?

Hon. David Caplan: First of all, I want to thank the member for the question. I also do want to indicate that the member, as well as the member from Simcoe—Grey, did come forward with the administration and supporters of Markdale hospital and did have a conversation with both my colleague Minister Smitherman and myself.

The ministry is well aware of the needs identified by the Grey Bruce Health Services for the construction of a proposed new hospital facility in Markdale. That's why, on July 20, my predecessor, Minister Smitherman, confirmed the ministry's support to proceed with the planning and design of the redevelopment of the Markdale site. I believe he provided some \$3 million in planning and design funds and provided those grants toward the costs associated with developing the proposed project.

On October 16 of last year, Grey Bruce Health submitted its functional plan and related materials to the Ministry of Health, which was followed by supplementary information that was received toward the end of November, and the submission is currently under review. I have more to add in the supplementary regarding the specifics of the project.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Murdoch: Yes, I hope we get some more in your supplementary, because I still need you to tell us that you are dedicated to doing this, the same as the previous minister—as you mentioned, on July 20, and that was two years ago. So we are sort of waiting at Markdale. It is a year ago now that the previous money you mentioned was given to them, so we're waiting for the next step.

We just want to know how long this is going to take, because as you know, the study did say that this hospital should be built. We're waiting in Markdale for some more answers, and maybe you can supply those in your supplementary.

Hon. David Caplan: I do want to thank the member and I do want to recognize his advocacy on behalf of the community that he serves.

I know that he understands there are many requests and many needs right across the province of Ontario. That's why in our first five-year capital plan, called ReNew Ontario, we were able to devote over \$5 billion in resources to support over 100 capital projects. There are another about 57 or 58 which have been identified, of which Markdale is one, that we are in a conversation on with my colleague the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure as he puts together the 10-year, \$60-billion capital plan. I want to assure the member that Markdale is a

part of that mix, of those requests that are outstanding, and will be part of that consideration as that plan is put together.

It has been nothing short of an infrastructure renaissance which has seen these projects begin. My colleague beside me reminds me that the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ARTS AND CULTURAL FUNDING

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: My question is for the Minister of Culture. Arts and culture not only enrich our lives, they also contribute to our economic prosperity. In my community of Hamilton, we have a thriving arts community. According to census data, almost 5% of all Ontario artists live in the Hamilton area. Government support for arts and culture is important to our community's quality of life and to stimulate local economic activity.

Can the Minister of Culture tell this House what the government is doing to invest in Hamilton artists and arts organizations?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: I am very pleased that this summer I had the opportunity to visit Hamilton, and, actually, many times since, and experienced a very vibrant community that local artists have helped to create. Without question, arts and culture are the pillars upon which Hamiltonians are building their community.

The Ontario Arts Council, an agency of my ministry, just recently provided more than \$740,000 to 18 Hamilton arts organizations and seven individual artists. I'm very pleased that since 2003, our government has invested more than \$4 million in Hamilton's arts community so that it continues to grow and thrive.

By investing in local artists and arts organizations, the McGuinty government is helping Hamilton attract more tourists and generate more economic activity and continue to flourish and grow to be the creative centre it is.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I'm pleased to hear that artists and arts organizations in my community of Hamilton will benefit from the government's investment through the Ontario Arts Council. Hamilton arts organizations such as Theatre Aquarius, which I was proud to serve as a board member, will certainly be pleased with the government's support.

Many people in Ontario and in my riding know the importance of the arts, both in their lives and to our economy. In Ontario, the cultural sector contributes billions of dollars to the provincial economy and employs thousands of Ontarians. Could the Minister of Culture tell this House what investments the government is making to support artists and arts organizations across Ontario?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: Thank you again to my colleague. Last year the government, through the Ontario Arts Council, provided \$40 million to support 1,300 individuals and 874 organizations. These grants benefited artists in more than 250 communities right across this fair province.

Earlier this year, the McGuinty government announced a \$20-million increase to the Ontario Arts Council budget, which brings it up to \$60 million when that is fully implemented. Just to give you some context, that represents an increase of 140% to the arts council compared to the previous Tory government and that's more than double what the Tories invested. These government investments are helping to bring \$20 billion to our economy, and that continues to create more than 250,000 jobs.

LOCAL HEALTH INTEGRATION NETWORKS

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Minister of Health: In the McGuinty government's new LHIN scheme, emergency services and surgery will be eliminated from Douglas Memorial Hospital in Fort Erie and Port Colborne General hospital. Other hospital services like maternity will be taken out of Niagara Falls general. Just a year ago, neither your predecessor, the Premier nor your local Liberal candidates breathed a single word about these dramatic hospital service reductions. In fact, your candidates promised just the opposite.

Minister, the health care buck stops with you. You make the call. Will you stay true to your campaign promises, set aside this tainted process and preserve these vital hospital services in these communities?

Hon. David Caplan: I think it's important to understand, that hospital improvement plan has come forward by Niagara health services itself. It's gone through quite an extensive community consultation and conversation and, in fact, we've had the president and CEO of the Ottawa Hospital, Dr. Jack Kitts, bring his team to be able to provide advice and provide that engagement with—

Hon. Jim Watson: Excellent leader.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Excellent leader.

Hon. David Caplan: I hear my colleagues from Ottawa talk about Dr. Kitts being an excellent health care and system leader.

In fact, Dr. Kitts engaged the local community and has made some recommendations to the LHIN. The LHIN has received his report on the feasibility and the impact of the Niagara Health System improvement plan at its board meeting, in fact, yesterday. The board is not expected to make any immediate decisions on the hospital improvement plan or on Dr. Kitts's study. The board will take the time to consider the information and will announce its decision and implementation plan to the community by the end of the year. I'm pleased about the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Minister, you know the fix was in. Your government gave the NHS marching orders to cut \$15 million from the budget and gave them six weeks to do it. You then gave extraordinary powers to unelected, unaccountable and largely anonymous government appointees on the LHIN. Minister—that's what it says on your desk—you're accountable for how every health care

dollar is spent. Five thousand people came out in Fort Erie; 2,500 people came out in Port Colborne to protest the elimination of emergency services. There can be no more clear signal of the vital nature of these hospitals to health care and economic development in Fort Erie and Port Colborne. Minister, will you come out from behind the skirts of your LHIN and stand up for health care in these two communities?

Hon. David Caplan: Well, in fact, since 2003-04, base funding in the Niagara Health System has increased 43%. And that's a marked contrast to this member, when he sat on this side of the House, when he and his colleagues cut funding, cut and threw a number of personnel out on the street and, in fact, to this day continue to advocate for a \$3-billion cut to health care services. I shudder to think what the impact of that kind of an action would be on Niagara Health System and on the services that the good people of Niagara rely upon.

In fact, we've seen 368 new long-term-care beds in the Niagara area. We've seen 96 more permanent beds that will be coming online by 2010 in our aging-at-home strategy, investing another \$60 million. We brought in the expertise of Dr. Kitts, and I would quote him. He says, "In terms of improving quality"—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

HOSPITAL GOVERNANCE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Today a report from the Ontario Health Coalition revealed that ministry-appointed hospital supervisors are attempting to wipe out elected, community-based boards in Midland-Penetanguishene, Alliston and Scarborough. This move will end a 100-year history of community involvement in local hospital boards and wipe out voting rights for thousands of citizens. My question is simple: Has this ministry approved a policy that ends community-elected hospital boards?

Hon. David Caplan: That's a very interesting question coming from this particular member. This member in fact was appointed by a former Minister of Health to a district health council in 1999. I know that because the health minister at the time was my mother. This member also was appointed by Ruth Grier in 1994, also to a district health council. It's a very interesting message.

Let me outline the facts. Dr. Kevin Smith, the supervisor, has been working with the hospital board, the corporation and the community toward establishing a permanent governance structure. I support the supervisor's proposed governance structure for the Huronia District Hospital, which includes the use of a community advisory nominated committee to help select original board members, and his decision to provide spaces on the board for citizen advisory members—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It's interesting to know that the minister actually has read my resumé. He might have

missed the part, though, that said that I also wrote chapters of books on community governance in hospitals. They're a good read.

The minister promised to keep our local hospitals democratic. They promised hospitals would be accountable to the communities they serve. Yet, while the government speaks of its support for community governance of hospitals, the ministry is appointing supervisors who are taking over these hospitals and making recommendations to shut down elected hospital boards. Is this government in support of community governance for hospitals?

Hon. David Caplan: In fact, there are several elements of accountability to the local community, including hospital reports. If the member is as expert as she claims, she would know that Ontario is the only province in Canada which publishes hospital reports, an independent report card on hospitals' performances and acknowledged by experts as the North American gold standard; that we also have accreditation and professional regulations; that we have hospital service accountability agreements; that we have public reporting; that we have value-for-money audits which are performed; and that we have the Public Hospitals Act.

Dr. Smith amended the governance proposal. I believe it is fair. It's a fair compromise for community concerns of transparency and for citizen input that ensures the balance against the proven best practices and skills of board membership.

MEMBER'S BIRTHDAY

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just want to take this opportunity to congratulate the member for Nepean-Carleton on her birthday today. Happy birthday, Lisa.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Just a reminder to the members that there's a flag raising, the Turkish flag raising. We want to welcome Nedim Duzenli, the president of the Federation of Canadian Turkish Associations, and Mehmet Bor, the vice-president. That flag raising is taking place at noon today.

This House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1134 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Bob Delaney: It's my personal pleasure this afternoon to introduce to the House Tariq Asmi, executive director of the Growing Communities Healthcare Alliance, who is seated in the east members' gallery. I urge members to give him a warm welcome.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: It's my pleasure to introduce Betty Doré, Bruce Sworik, Mike Carson and Katherine Low from the London and St. Thomas Association of Realtors.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I'm pleased to introduce lawyer Jim Stengel from Welland, who's being hosted here by Denise Turner, who of course is the mother of page Kevin Turner, who has impressed us all in the time that he has been here.

Mr. Mike Colle: It gives me great honour to introduce Chief William Montour of Six Nations. Welcome. It's a great honour to have you here, Chief.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CHICKEN FARMERS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise today in the House to welcome the Chicken Farmers of Ontario to Queen's Park. With us today we have Bill Woods, chair of the Chicken Farmers; Rob Dougans, the CEO; Murray Booy; Lee Woods; and Ed Verkley.

The Chicken Farmers of Ontario is a non-profit organization that has been operating since 1965. Since then, it has been successful in leading the industry within the province.

The chicken industry has over half a billion dollars in sales and creates over 5,000 full-time jobs both on the farm and in the industry. Nearly 40% of all the chicken farms in Canada are located in Ontario.

The guidance and support that Chicken Farmers of Ontario provides is helping hard-working chicken farmers, protecting the environment, and ensuring that all Ontarians benefit from a safe, nutritious and affordable product.

We know how hard all our farmers work in Ontario and the challenges they are facing with high input costs and new government legislation. During this time of economic uncertainty, it is important that we help farmers succeed and that the government doesn't burden them with unnecessary regulations, taxation and red tape. The government needs a long-term vision that considers the real and practical needs of the farmers who work as hard as they do to feed all of us.

I want to commend the Chicken Farmers of Ontario for their hard work. They make a great contribution to our farmers, the agriculture industry and the economy.

Earlier today, John Tory and I met with these representatives to hear the concerns of chicken farmers, and I hope all the members of the Legislature will take the opportunity today to meet with them and hear their concerns and show their support for the Chicken Farmers of Ontario. Thank you very much for allowing me this time to recognize them here at Queen's Park.

TERMINATION AND SEVERANCE PAYMENTS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: This past weekend, I was in Ajax, supporting a demonstration of steelworkers at Sklar Fur-

niture. Most of the people in this Legislature will know the name Sklar Peppler. It was a profitable company for decades. It supplied secure, well-paid employment to working people. A new owner purchased the company a few years ago and decided to take advantage of bankruptcy laws and trade policies to satisfy what one can only call outright greed. The company continues to sell its product, continues to supply other Canadian retailers with its product and continues to make a profit, yet the company has had CCAA protection that resulted in employees who had worked for the company for over 25 years losing their right to severance and termination pay. For some, the amount exceeded \$30,000. This company has ignored arbitration orders, court orders, and even forced the union to attempt to seize assets to satisfy judgments. The government should not condone this company's practices through silence.

I ask myself: How can this company operate? How can it make a profit in Ontario and Canada and behave in this manner and treat its workers in this fashion?

I ask the Premier and this government to investigate the situation at Sklar Peppler and take action to protect these working people.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Phil McNeely: Toronto Star columnist Carol Goar pointed out some very important facts on the employment insurance system in her column today titled "Advice for Ontario: Play Hardball." Let's take a look at the facts surrounding EI in Ontario. Workers who do qualify for employment insurance in Ontario receive considerably less in EI than other Canadians: \$4,630 less per year per person. That's a shortfall in EI benefits of \$2.1 billion every year for Ontarians. What's more, although Ontario had 42% of Canada's unemployed population in 2007, Ontarians received only 27% of EI funding for labour market support and training. Furthermore, Ontario's unemployment rate is 6.4%, higher than the national average of 6.2%. Ontario has been a stalwart partner in this federation and continues to be. It's high time that the federal government give Ontarians the same deal they'd get had they lived elsewhere in Canada.

It's time for the federal government to supplement EI support for unemployed workers in the manufacturing sector by providing targeted resources for training and other supports. This proposal is the right thing to do for Ontario workers and their families and it's also the smart thing to do. It's time for the federal government to act on the fairness for Ontario campaign and give Ontarians their fair share. I call on Prime Minister Harper to immediately right this wrong against Ontarians caught in this economic downturn.

CHARLES DUBIN

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I rise today to pay tribute to Justice Charles Dubin, who passed away on October 27.

Born in Hamilton in 1921, Justice Dubin died at the age of 87 as a result of pneumonia. Justice Dubin was held in high regard by many as one of the top lawyers and judges in Canada. He was called to the bar in 1944 and appointed Queen's Counsel at the age of 29. This made him the youngest person in the British Commonwealth to receive this honour. He had a brilliant legal mind, able to work in both civil and criminal cases. He was strongly opposed to capital punishment and successfully defended 14 men on capital murder charges.

In 1991, Justice Dubin was appointed Chief Justice of Ontario and held that role until 1996. Justice Dubin headed a number of royal commissions, most notably the Dubin inquiry, which examined the highly publicized issue of drug use in amateur sport after the 1988 Olympics, when the Olympic gold medal was taken away from Ben Johnson after positive test results for a banned drug.

Justice Dubin left a tremendous legal legacy and will be remembered as one of Canada's top lawyers, alongside Arthur Maloney and John Robinette. His notable legacy will be followed by many young lawyers for generations to come.

GREEK COMMUNITY

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: Sixty-eight years ago, the Greeks said "Oxi," or "No," to the demand that Greece submit to foreign occupation. Instead, the Greeks were guided by a strong sense of hope and optimism for their future and they chose the path of resistance. Four years later, the Greeks regained control of their country.

Every year on October 28, Oxi Day is celebrated by Greek communities the world over, from Hamilton to Welland to Athens, as a reminder of the sacrifices made by Greek men and women during the Second World War. Oxi is also a time to reflect on the values of the Greek people: the importance of community, sacrifice and justice. It symbolizes working together with courage, optimism and resolve to protect a way of life for future generations and to prosper collectively.

Hamilton, Ontario and Canada are fortunate to have strong and vibrant Greek communities which hold these values at their core. They share and promote these values among their fellow citizens and have played a major part in the success of this province. Together with Ontarians from a variety of different backgrounds, the Greek community has been instrumental in making Ontario an inclusive, optimistic and prosperous society which is a model to the world. As a daughter of Greek immigrants and a proud representative of Hamilton Mountain, I have the privilege of sharing and celebrating Oxi Day with everyone here today and with Greek communities across this province.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I want to speak today about our long-term-care residents. Premier McGuinty broke his 2003 promise to them by promising to invest in better nursing home care and to provide them with an additional

\$6,000 in care for every resident. However, he did not do so and, as a result, today Ontario funds significantly less personal care than Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba and New Brunswick. Not only has this government failed to provide this funding for personal care, but they have left more than 24,000 Ontarians waiting for a long-term-care bed. Consequently, many of these people are occupying beds in hospitals, and this, of course, contributes to emergency room overcrowding and the cancellation of surgery.

1510

Furthermore, about 35,000 nursing home residents continue to live in older homes that do not meet our 1998 design standards. This government must make senior care a priority. Our government did. In 1998, we invested \$1.2 billion, and we built 20,000 new long-term-care beds and upgraded 16,000.

I urge the Premier today: Support my petition calling for a six-point plan to improve personal—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

MAISON INTERLUDE HOUSE

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Vendredi dernier, j'ai eu l'honneur et le plaisir d'accompagner la ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, l'honorable Madeleine Meilleur, au gala du 25^e anniversaire de la Maison Interlude à Hawkesbury.

Maison Interlude House was founded in 1983 and offers services to women victims of partner abuse and their children in Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, Stormont and Dundas. The agency has 25 employees, is managed by a volunteer board of directors and is funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

La Maison Interlude offre de l'hébergement sécuritaire aux femmes victimes de violence, qui peuvent venir habiter temporairement à la maison avec leurs enfants. Ils offrent également un programme pour les enfants témoins ou victimes de violence conjugale. Tous les services sont offerts gratuitement, en français et en anglais.

Maison Interlude provides shelter and a 24-hour crisis line, seven days a week.

Je félicite la directrice générale de la Maison Interlude, M^{me} Céline Pelletier, sa présidente, M^{me} Marie-Josée Gauthier, ainsi que tous les employés de cette maison pour leur travail exemplaire avec des gens qui en sont à des moments extrêmement difficiles dans leur vie.

REPUBLIC OF TURKEY

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Eighty-five years ago, on October 29, 1923, an important event took place in the history of mankind: the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. Turkey is known officially as the Republic of Turkey. It's a Eurasian country that stretches across the Anatolian peninsula in western Asia and Thrace in the Balkan region in southeastern Europe.

Turkey is a democratic, secular, unitary country, a constitutional republic whose political system was esta-

blished in 1923 under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk following the fall of the Ottoman Empire in the aftermath of World War I. Since then, Turkey has increasingly integrated with the west while continuing to foster relations with eastern Europe and the eastern world.

It is a founding member of the United Nations, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and a member state of the Council of Europe since 1949 and of NATO since 1952.

While we today congratulate the community on this special event, we also wish to recognize the significant contributions that Turkish people have made to Canada in the growth and development of our country. I had the pleasure today to meet with a number of these organizations, and today, on this very special day for the Republic of Turkey, we wish them the very best in many more days to come.

CHICKEN FARMERS OF ONTARIO

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Today is Chicken Day at Queen's Park, and I rise once again to invite everybody to the annual wings-and-beers reception starting at 4:30 this afternoon in committee room number 2. This annual event has developed quite a reputation here at Queen's Park for extending good old country hospitality to all who attend.

As a fellow chicken producer, I am very proud and happy to welcome Chicken Farmers of Ontario, their board members and their district representatives to Queen's Park. CFO's chair is Bill Woods, and my own district 3 representative, Murray Booy, is the first vice-president. They are joined here by Rob Dougans, who is our new CEO, and Ed Verkley and Lee Woods, who are also in the gallery with them.

The CFO has been in existence since 1965, when chicken producers became part of the Canadian supply management system. Our own government continues to be a strong supporter of the Chicken Farmers of Ontario and all supply-managed commodities, nationally and at the international level.

The 1,100 farmers of the CFO produce 200 million chickens every year, making chicken the meat of choice among consumers in Ontario, with a per capita consumption of 67.7 pounds per year.

Canada is the 10th-largest chicken-producing nation in the world, and this industry provides about 5,000 full-time jobs and numerous spinoff jobs in the transportation, food services and retail sectors.

Again, please join us for wings and beer in committee room—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. I'd also remind the members that there is a reception, as well, for the taste of the greenbelt taking place and there are a number of chefs. So you don't need to go out and order dinner tonight; you can enjoy—and staff watching

back in their offices are welcome to join these receptions as well today.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

TOM LONGBOAT DAY ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LE JOUR TOM LONGBOAT

Mr. Colle moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 120, An Act to proclaim Tom Longboat Day /
Projet de loi 120, Loi proclamant le Jour Tom Longboat.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement?

Mr. Mike Colle: Tom Longboat, Cogwagee, an honoured son of the Onondaga First Nation, was a remarkable Canadian athlete whose accomplishments as a marathon runner made him an international superstar. He was also wounded twice in the service of his country during World War I. By making June 4 Tom Longboat Day, we would ensure that his legacy is passed on to Ontarians for generations to come.

USE OF STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

Mr. Peter Kormos: Point of order, Mr. Speaker: Of course, I received, as is the protocol, copies of the statements to be made by Minister Best and Minister Wynne, as well as a statement to be made by Minister Matthews. The issue is this: I put the statements of Minister Best and Minister Wynne side by side, and they're announcing the same thing. They share common paragraphs, not in their entirety, but they share common facts.

I looked at the standing orders. Standing order 35 speaks about "a minister," and I presume that means one minister; we don't have duets here or trios or quartets. We don't have—

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I'm serious. We don't have barbershop harmony. This begs the punchline, "How many ministers does it take to announce a project?"

Speaker, the reason I make this point of order is because, of course, the government has 20 minutes, and that's to accommodate more than one minister—we understand that—or a particularly lengthy ministerial statement, even though the standing order requires that they be brief; the opposition caucuses only have five minutes each. I submit to you that it's an abuse by the government of the 20 minutes allowed them when you have two ministers, one after the other, effectively making the same statement and we're not allowed the opportunity to respond, one after the other, to the consecutive statements.

1520

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I appreciate the consultation with the table. That was not a point of order. The standing orders do not allow me to grant the member any additional time. That would have to be done through unanimous consent of the House. There are often initiatives that come forward from government that do cross over ministries. We'll allow the Minister of Education to proceed.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

HEALTHY SCHOOLS ÉCOLES SAINES

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: This morning, Health Promotion Minister Margaret Best and I, in a cross-ministerial initiative, challenged schools across Ontario to become even healthier.

We visited Holy Family Catholic school in Toronto to launch the third year of the healthy schools recognition program. This school has participated in the program for the last two years and has introduced some great programs to help students and staff become healthier. The recognition program celebrates schools like this one that pledge to develop at least one more activity to become healthier.

Les avantages sont clairs : lorsque les élèves sont en bonne santé, ils apprennent mieux.

They are less stressed, they are less likely to get sick and they can focus better in the classroom.

Students all across Ontario want to be healthier, and they're using their own ingenuity and creativity to come up with great ideas to do so. That's what is wonderful about this program. They can participate in the program by introducing a new healthy activity or by building on existing ones.

Earlier this year, we launched the Eating Well Looks Good on You pilot project. This new pilot project provides schools with healthy recipes that use fresh, locally grown food. Using the Eating Well Looks Good on You recipes, for example, is a great way to promote healthy eating in schools. Schools that use those recipes are eligible for the recognition program.

But there are other options, and I know the members opposite understand how important it is for kids in our schools to be healthy and for us to take part in encouraging that. Schools can encourage physical activity or healthy eating through a basic nutrition program or having a workshop with a dietitian. Healthy activities could focus on promoting mental health, healthy growth or personal safety and injury prevention. They could also focus on helping to prevent bullying or substance abuse and use.

L'important, c'est de poser un geste sain, et de travailler ensemble.

We encourage schools to work with their school councils, student representatives and community groups to find and implement a healthy activity in their school.

The program is easy to participate in, very straightforward and, most importantly, the benefits are long-lasting for the whole school community.

HEALTHY SCHOOLS

Hon. Margaret R. Best: It was my pleasure to attend this morning with Education Minister Kathleen Wynne to challenge schools across the province to help make Ontario students healthier. It certainly was a collaboration between ministries. That is how we work together, as government, to look out for the best interests of the children of the province of Ontario.

Since its launch by the McGuinty government in 2006, the healthy schools recognition program has been working to encourage Ontario schools to carry out at least one new healthy activity for each school year.

I am very pleased to say that in the first two years of the healthy school recognition program, more than 1,700 schools have pledged to undertake more than 4,600 healthy activities and our government has recognized those schools for their healthy initiatives. Some examples of these activities include full-time breakfast clubs, presentations from police on bullying prevention, and fitness days. Schools can either implement something new that they create or participate in an existing program such as Active and Safe Routes to School, Raise the Bar, or the northern fruit and vegetable program.

The healthy schools recognition program is founded on the knowledge that a healthy learning environment is essential for students to reach their full potential. Learning healthy habits at an early age can last a lifetime.

We not only encourage, but also engage, Ontarians in initiatives to make good choices when it comes to healthy eating, active living and overall wellness.

We know that we can always do more to make schools healthier places to learn and grow. That is why we educate our young people about healthy eating and healthy living, and provide them with the right tools to become champions of good health so that we can develop a culture built on good, healthy habits for generations to come.

WOMAN ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I rise in the House today to acknowledge November as Woman Abuse Prevention Month.

On average, two women in Ontario are killed each month by their partners. In 2006, on average almost 1,000 incidents of spousal violence were reported to the Ontario police each month.

We know that the vast majority of abused women do not report these crimes to the police. These women live in fear and in silence. But their stories are real. They are

about women desperately seeking a better life for themselves and for their children.

The recent Domestic Violence Death Review Committee report called for more public education and training about domestic violence. We could not agree more. Each year, we invest over \$208 million in services that support women and protect them from violence, including our domestic violence action plan, which is investing \$87 million in new funding over four years.

The encouraging stories are also real, and I hear them directly from our stakeholders and our partners. We know that women are expressing courage and finding dignity through supports and programs that offer choices—a choice to make a change.

Kate Wiggins is the executive director of the Women's Community House in London. She and her team of impassioned and inspiring women witness the cycle of abuse every day. The struggle to leave is real. In Kate's words, "It's what you know and it's who you love." She speaks of mothers who choose to return to an abusive household simply because of the devastating pressure of their children wanting their family to be intact. But she also speaks of the incredible change and hope she sees—and that we see—throughout the province.

Research shows that positive attitudes adopted at an early age are a critical way to tackle violence before it happens. Our Equality Rules campaign focuses on getting our kids thinking and talking about respectful, healthy and equitable relationships. We have developed tools for teachers to use in the classroom.

Our Neighbours, Friends and Families public education campaign focuses on recognizing the warning signs of abuse so we all know what to do to help. The materials are simple and effective. They suggest signs to look for. For example,

"She may be apologetic," and make excuses for her partner's behaviour....

"She seems to be sick more often and misses work

"She tries to cover her bruises."

We have implemented this campaign in over 140 communities, and it continues to grow, reaching more and more communities across the province. It has been culturally adapted to serve aboriginal Ontarians through the Kanawayhitowin program, and Voisin-es, ami-es et familles for French-speaking Ontarians.

We're also training our front-line service providers and our professionals to see the early signs of abuse and offer appropriate response, information and supports. So far, over 9,000 professionals have been trained through this program.

Women abuse prevention is everyone's business. There is still work that needs to be done for women to be safe. But I am encouraged when I hear Kate Wiggins say that this is the first government that has had a domestic violence action plan. And we have made some strides. We will continue to work toward ending women abuse in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

HEALTHY SCHOOLS

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to respond, on behalf of the official opposition, to the statement by the Minister of Health Promotion and the Minister of Education.

As the opposition critic for the Ministry of Health Promotion, and a registered nurse, I do agree that health promotion initiatives should take into account the importance of teaching Ontarians, especially younger Ontarians, about the importance of making healthy choices in terms of eating and staying active and learning.

In my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, I'm pleased to recognize the Trillium Lakelands District School Board for some of the healthy choice initiatives implemented, including the healthy breakfast and snack nutrition programs, as well as the healthy fundraising program.

The Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board has also worked to implement a nutrition policy that includes more active and healthier school days for students.

The Durham region, which is part of my riding, has also shown some real leadership in focusing on healthier students. But children and young people have a right to access healthy products and activities in their schools.

1530

What both the Minister of Education and the Minister of Health Promotion have failed to address is a matter of equal and even further importance. It's the fact that children and young people also have a right to feel safe in the schools that they attend. I point to the newspaper article from today that lists no less than 13 incidents of severe kinds of school attacks this year, and this is only in the greater Toronto area. The disturbing list includes numerous beatings, nine cases of stabbings and three cases of shootings, culminating in yet another stabbing of a 15-year-old student in Don Mills yesterday. My colleagues from Newmarket-Aurora as well as Burlington, along with our entire caucus, have repeatedly called on the minister to implement mandatory reporting on school violence. The minister has refused to act. We owe it to all people in the province of Ontario, young people and their parents, to ensure that those in positions of responsibility are ensuring a safe and secure learning environment.

Back in June, the Minister of Education promised she would be considering a report from the safe schools action team to deal with the instances of school attacks. She said this report would be due in the fall. It's a pretty chilly day out here. I think fall has happened—no report and no response. The chair of that team who is also responsible for the missing report is none other than the member from Guelph. I ask this House, will we be hearing from the member from Guelph any time soon? Or has she decided that political science is more important than ensuring proper protocols exist for the safety of young students in schools cross this province?

I doubt that the parents and guardians of children in schools that are listed on page 3 of the Toronto Sun have faith in Minister Wynne and the member from Guelph when they say, "Wait and see," which is their attitude to

tackling school safety. I am amazed that they can sit idly by and be silent and compromise the safety of our young children, all in the name of political correctness.

Lessons in fat-free foods and healthy lifestyles are always important, but Progressive Conservatives also believe that the safety of the environment where our children go to learn is as vital to their future as the content of their lunch pails.

WOMAN ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I'm pleased to rise today to acknowledge Woman Abuse Prevention Month. This month provides us an opportunity to bring about awareness and further understanding concerning the issue of violence against women.

I'm pleased to announce that in my community, Durham College will be running a series of events in recognition of Woman Abuse Prevention Month. First, the college will be holding a Jeans for Justice campaign. In remembrance of an overturned 1998 rape conviction, Durham College students will write messages on jeans to reconfirm their commitment to the reduction in violence against women and sexual assault. On November 20, Durham College is inviting community members to listen to public speaker Jackson Katz, one of America's leading advocates for the prevention of violence against women.

This year, Durham Region Transit will be showing their support of Woman Abuse Prevention Month by posting ads on their buses for The Denise House, a women's shelter in my riding, at no charge.

I would also like to acknowledge the work of The Denise House, Bethesda House, Muslim Women's Welfare Home and the YWCA. These are all women's shelters in my community that work tirelessly to assist abused women in fleeing domestic violence.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge and commend my colleague the member from Durham for bringing forward the Lori Dupont Act as a private member's bill. This would facilitate the obtaining of a court order for restraint by using a justice or a JP from a family court on a 24/7 basis. I would certainly urge all members of this House to support it. It was previously brought forward by the previous member for Whitby-Oshawa but was never proclaimed. I hope that upon reflection, the members of this House will realize the importance this act brings forward and the important safety it brings forward to women trying to flee difficult domestic situations and that it could save lives. I hope all members will consider this when this bill is brought forward.

WOMAN ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I rise to acknowledge Woman Abuse Prevention Month. I wish I didn't have to. We live in a culture of violence against women, such that StatsCan says that one in every two women is going to be the victim of assault or abuse in her lifetime. To bring it home, that means that of all the women MPPs here, 50%

of them have experienced, statistically speaking, abuse or assault. It means that every member's mother here, independent of that member's gender, has probably experienced sexual abuse or assault. It means that our daughters—there are members here whose daughters have experienced sexual abuse or assault. It certainly doesn't bode well for our granddaughters.

It's not enough to simply acknowledge a month. It's absolutely imperative that we act. To that end, I've tabled a motion calling upon all women here to form an all-party non-partisan committee to look at ways of ending abuse and assault against women. This cannot be a partisan affair. Here is what we need to do, among other actions.

Number one, we need women's studies in our schools. The Miss G Project has asked for this time and time again. We still don't have it.

We need safe transition housing, as well as more shelter beds for those who are escaping abuse. We still don't have adequate numbers of shelter beds; we still don't have transition housing.

We need, primarily, economic equity. Someone who is economically dependent upon their abuser will never be free from that abuser.

We need, certainly, funding to go to the equity commission. We now have a situation in Ontario where women make 71 cents on the dollar that men make. We need action there.

We need a living wage because the face of poverty is a female face; it's mainly women who make minimum wage. We need \$10.25 an hour now, and indexed to inflation.

As I say again, we need to put our resources behind finding solutions. That means an all-party committee of women who are going to work together to end abuse. We have failed our mothers, we have failed ourselves, we have failed our daughters, and we will fail our granddaughters unless we act now.

HEALTHY SCHOOLS

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm happy to respond to the Minister of Education's statement on the Healthy Schools initiative. I want to say, it's hard to be negative about these announcements, but it is equally hard to be positive, I have to tell you. You have these little mini-approaches to the better health of our students, these little initiatives, but they do not replace and cannot replace a comprehensive approach to health and healthy students. That's what we're dealing with here.

Of course we know that schools have an amazing potential to help young people develop healthy habits and teach them to make healthy and wise choices well into their lives. When you state in your statement that when students are healthy they learn better, wouldn't it be better to eliminate poverty? Because that, in my view, and yours, I suspect, would go a long way to improving the learning of our kids. That would be a comprehensive

approach to dealing with learning and why it is that some kids do not learn.

Then you say that using the Eating Well Looks Good on You recipes, for example, is a great way to promote healthy eating in schools. I propose, and I think it would be better and you might agree, that if we had family studies programs in our elementary schools, if they were reinstated in our schools, that would teach children about food and healthy living in a systematic, comprehensive way. Wouldn't that be a better way to go? And by the way, rather than getting children to jump up and down for 20 minutes in their classrooms, wouldn't it be better to have physical education teachers in our schools, rather than having only 35% of our schools have gym teachers?

We look at better ways to dealing with problems. Wouldn't it be better to keep schools open, particularly in rural and northern communities, rather than having students be on a bus for hours to get to their schools? Wouldn't it be better, in a much more comprehensive way, to support my bill, which says, let's ban advertising to kids under the age of 13—a banning of ads for calorie-rich and nutrient-poor foods? Wouldn't that go a long way to keeping our kids healthy?

I say to you, Minister, these little, mini-approaches are nice, but can't you think of a better way to do it, a more comprehensive approach that deals with the health of our kids? That's what I propose to you.

PETITIONS

LOGGING ROUTE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have received more petitions to do with logging through the village of Restoule. This petition reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Nipissing forest management plan proposes to use Hawthorne Drive in Restoule, which features a single-lane bridge and narrow and steep sections; and

"Whereas area residents have grave concerns about community safety, traffic speed, truck noise and general wear and tear of Hawthorne Drive and the bridge in the village of Restoule; and

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"Whereas the proposed route travels past the Restoule Canadian Legion and two churches; and

"Whereas alternative routes are possible via Odorizzi Road and Block 09-056;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario put the safety and concerns of the people of Restoule ahead of logging interests and ensure an alternate route is selected for the Nipissing forest management plan."

I support this petition.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: This petition is about the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, Bill 56. It's a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas only police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

Since I agree with this petition 100%, I'm delighted to sign it.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas Ontarians who now live in long-term-care homes are increasingly older, frailer and have greater complex care needs;

"Whereas our elder parents, family and friends deserve to live with dignity and respect;

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberal government failed to revolutionize long-term care and broke its promise to seniors to provide \$6,000 in personal care, per resident;

"Whereas five years of Liberal inaction has restricted Ontario's ability to meet the demands of our aging population;

"Whereas more than 24,000 Ontarians are currently waiting for an LTC bed;

"Whereas Ontario funds significantly less resident care than Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba and New Brunswick;

"Whereas dedicated LTC homes are short-staffed and have not been given resources to hire enough front-line workers to provide the level of care residents require;

"Whereas devoted LTC staff are burdened by cumbersome government regulations;

"Whereas some 35,000 seniors are living in LTC beds which do not meet more home-like design standards introduced in 1998 by the former PC government;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty government must enhance long-term care by: initiating a sector-wide staffing increase of 4,500 full-time positions within a year; expediting the

redevelopment of Ontario's 35,000 oldest long-term-care beds by providing adequate support and funding; achieving an average of three worked hours of personal care, per day, within a year; simplifying the regulations which govern nursing homes; producing a comprehensive plan with benchmarks to reduce LTC wait lists of more than 24,000 people; addressing inflationary pressures by adequately funding the increased operating costs of LTC homes."

I totally support this petition and have affixed my signature to it.

FERTILITY TREATMENT

Mr. Pat Hoy: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the prevalence and growing incidence of infertility in our population is a medical issue that demands the attention of our public health care system and should be placed on the agenda for funding;

"Whereas fertility treatment, including in vitro fertilization, is a proven medical solution that is unfairly limited to those with the financial means to pursue it, and it should receive significant coverage through the Ontario health care system as soon as possible;

"Whereas in vitro fertilization should be fully funded when deemed medically necessary, without discrimination based on cause or gender; and

"Whereas it is long overdue that financial assistance for fertility treatment be offered to Ontarians. We are residents of the province of Ontario and request that the Ontario provincial government address this important issue.

"We, the undersigned, strongly support the inclusion of financial assistance by the Ontario Ministry of Health under the Ontario health care program for all fertility treatment for Ontarians, male and female."

I have over 2,000 signatures with this petition and I have signed it.

PENSION PLANS

Mr. John O'Toole: I have a petition on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham, and the first signature, by the way, is Claudia Sytsma. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas consumers rely on timely and accurate information from insurance companies and other financial institutions when they apply for access to locked-in pension funds;

"Whereas the disclosure of wrong or incomplete information about pension fund access can have devastating consequences for the consumers;

"Whereas the Financial Services Commission of Ontario (FSCO) is currently limited in its power to enforce standards for the disclosure of information about access to pension funds;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to enact the necessary laws or regulations that will enable the Financial Services Commission of Ontario (FSCO) to hold financial institutions fully accountable for information they give clients about access to pension funds," and other financial instruments in the province of Ontario.

I am pleased to sign this and support it for all those pensioners who are concerned about locked-in retirement funds.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly that was provided to me by Mr. Ken Elsey, president and CEO, Canadian Energy Efficiency Alliance, and a resident of Lisgar in the great riding of Mississauga–Streetsville. It reads as follows:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I am pleased to sign and to support this petition, and to ask page Willem to carry it for me.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. John Yakabuski: I have copies of petitions assembled throughout the province during the intersession, including a resolution from the township of Stirling-Rawdon.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the skyrocketing price of gasoline is causing hardship to families across Ontario; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberal government charges a gasoline tax of 14.7 cents per litre to drivers in all parts of Ontario; and

"Whereas gasoline tax revenues now go exclusively to big cities with transit systems, while roads and bridges crumble in other communities across Ontario; and

"Whereas residents of Ontario have been shut out of provincial gasoline tax revenues to which they have contributed; and

"Whereas whatever one-time money has flowed to municipalities from the McGuinty Liberal government has been neither stable nor predictable and has been insufficient to meet our infrastructure needs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to redistribute provincial gasoline tax revenues fairly to all communities across the province."

I support this petition and sign it, and send it to the table with Ethan.

FERTILITY TREATMENT

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for recognizing me again on this important issue of funding for in vitro fertilization. The following is sent to you by about 25 people:

"Whereas the prevalence and growing incidence of infertility in our population is a medical issue that demands the attention of our public health care system and should be placed on the agenda for funding;

"Whereas fertility treatment, including in vitro fertilization, is a proven medical solution that is unfairly limited to those with the financial means to pursue it, and it should receive significant coverage through the Ontario health care system as soon as possible;

"Whereas in vitro fertilization should be fully funded when deemed medically necessary, without discrimination based on cause or gender;

"Whereas it is long overdue that financial assistance for fertility treatment be offered to Ontarians. We are residents of the province of Ontario and request that the Ontario provincial government address this important issue.

"We, the undersigned, strongly support the inclusion of financial assistance by the Ontario Ministry of Health under the Ontario health care program for all fertility treatment for Ontarians, male and female."

Since I agree, I appreciate this opportunity.

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EMERGENCY DISPATCH SERVICES

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with 911 communication services in Muskoka and it reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is considering relocating emergency ambulance and fire dispatch services currently provided by Muskoka Ambulance Communications Service to the city of Barrie; and

"Whereas up to 40% of all calls received are from cellphones from people unfamiliar with the area; and

"Whereas Parry Sound–Muskoka residents have grave concerns about the effect on emergency response times if dispatch services are provided by dispatchers who are not familiar with the area; and

"Whereas 16 Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care-funded jobs, held by qualified communication officers from local communities, may be lost as a result of the relocation of dispatch services to the city of Barrie,

"Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario put the safety, health and economic concerns of the people of Parry Sound–Muskoka ahead of government efficiency interests and ensure that emergency dispatch services continue to be provided locally by Muskoka Ambulance Communications Service."

I support this petition.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Peter Kormos: I have a petition that was sent to Bob Delaney, MPP from Mississauga–Streetsville, that reads:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I send this with page Kevin Turner to the Clerks' table.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mr. Bob Delaney: I certainly thank my colleague from Welland for his effort, and I have a petition to address to the Parliament of Ontario that I'd like to read in support of my colleague from Newmarket–Aurora. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the legacy of Pope John Paul II reflects his lifelong commitment to international understanding, peace and the defence of equality and human rights;

"Whereas his legacy has an all-embracing meaning that is particularly relevant to Canada's multi-faith and multicultural traditions;

"Whereas, as one of the great spiritual leaders of contemporary times, Pope John Paul II visited Ontario during his pontificate of more than 25 years and, on his

visits, was enthusiastically greeted by Ontario's diverse religious and cultural communities;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to grant speedy passage into law of the private member's bill An Act to proclaim Pope John Paul II Day."

This is signed by a great many people, including many in my own riding of Mississauga–Streetsville. I'm pleased to add my signature to it and to ask page Andrew to carry it for me.

SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS UNIT

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which reads as follows:

"Whereas on September 18, 2005, James Maltar died from a gunshot wound at a police station;

"Whereas the SIU concluded he overpowered two police officers and shot himself;

"Whereas the Maltar family are not satisfied that there has been sufficient proof concerning the cause of James Maltar's death;

"Whereas the Ontario Ombudsman, in his report on the province's special investigations unit, was critical of the SIU for a number of practices and described the SIU as becoming 'complacent' about ensuring that police officials follow the rules;

"Whereas the James Maltar investigation was among seven cases highlighted in the recent Ombudsman's report, with the Ombudsman noting that witness officers and civilians in the Maltar case were not interviewed for more than one week following the incident;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to request that the Attorney General instruct the SIU to reopen its investigation into the death of James Maltar."

I'm pleased to sign this in support of my constituent and his family.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA SÉCURITÉ PROFESSIONNELLE ET L'ASSURANCE CONTRE LES ACCIDENTS DU TRAVAIL

Mr. Fonseca moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 119, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 / Projet de loi 119, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Debate?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, the member for Brampton West.

In leading off this debate on this bill, I'd like to underscore that, at the very heart of our proposed legislation, it's about safety, fairness and protection for those who work in Ontario's construction industry. The construction industry is a key economic driver in Ontario; over 400,000 people work in this industry.

I'm very proud to say also that our government has made significant investments in infrastructure—actually, through ReNew Ontario, \$30-billion-plus. That's investments in public transit, in our highways and our bridges, in our schools, in our hospitals, in affordable housing. All of these investments are helping to build a strong Ontario. They are vital to our competitiveness. In turn, we feel that it's of the utmost importance to protect those that are building that infrastructure, to make sure that we are investing in those that build.

Our proposed amendments to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997, will be good for the province's construction industry as they will help fight the underground economic activity in construction. The underground economic activity in construction is a significant problem. It's a problem that is estimated at about 84,500 people working in the underground economic activity in construction. What does that mean? Well, recent estimates by the Ontario Construction Secretariat have indicated that \$2 billion is lost to all levels of government. We want to continue to make investments in education, in health care, in our universities and our colleges, in our communities, with municipalities, and I know that that \$2 billion would go a long way to helping with those investments.

The proposed bill, if passed, would extend mandatory workers' compensation coverage to independent operators, sole proprietors, partners in a partnership and executive officers of corporations in the construction industry. These individuals are not currently required to purchase Workplace Safety and Insurance Board coverage. So why are we mandating that they do take WSIB insurance coverage? Today, I can tell you that there are individuals within the construction industry who declare themselves as independent operators or some other declaration, like executive officers, but the fact is that they are working on these construction sites and they're not insured. We want to make sure that their health and safety is taken care of, that they are insured.

It also affects all those good players, all those other construction workers—we have a lot of construction work going on here, around Queen's Park, right now, and many of those workers are insured; we would hope all of them. But we're not sure if all of them are insured and are paying their premiums to WSIB—making sure that we strengthen a system that has helped workers for close to 100 years in this province.

Our proposed legislation would mean a safer work environment for those whom it would cover. In addition to the financial protections provided by WSIB coverage,

individuals covered by workers' compensation have access to health and safety education and training resources, and they become part of a system, a system that tracks injuries and assists in injury prevention, as well as health and safety enforcement efforts.

1600

Through education, training, enforcement and insurance of these workers, we have built one of the healthiest, safest and fairest places to work in the entire world. We are the envy of many other jurisdictions. Many look to us to see what we have in place.

Within the system, we do a number of things: One, we look at making sure that when it comes to health and safety, we bring best practices to the construction sector and all other sectors. Within the construction sector, we have our health and safety associations that help businesses, be they small, medium or large enterprises, to be able to bring forward those best practices to help those businesses address health and safety in the workplace, and also to be able to deliver the message about how it affects their bottom line.

The businesses that have invested in health and safety and fairness with their workers are those enterprises, those organizations, be they small or big, where workers want to continue to be. Their retention levels are very high; their absenteeism is very low. The morale is very high. Those are the companies that are here for the long run. Those are the companies that have helped build the great province that we have here in Ontario. We want to make sure that we are there as a partner with them: labour, employers, employees, government working together for the health and safety of our workers.

The WSIB coverage provided under our bill would bring a sophisticated and necessary prevention component, return-to-work training and other services that those not currently part of the WSIB system don't have. Our bill would provide fairness at a time when it's more important than ever to provide a level playing field for construction employers who pay WSIB premiums and are part of this system. There are some groups, some members in this House, who would rather turn a blind eye to those in the underground economy within construction or other sectors. There are those here who would condone the practice of not having a level playing field, making sure that everybody who is bidding on a contract is bidding by the same rules. Well, we don't feel that way on this side of the House. Fairness is a principle that we should all live by. Fairness is something that I know has always been a part of my life.

As an athlete, I had the opportunity to represent Canada in the Olympic games—I ran the marathon. I love sport. I'm passionate about sport. It doesn't matter if you're on the ice, the baseball field, or in a race on the track, you want to make sure that there's an even playing field—that everybody is playing by the rules. I didn't like when the rules were broken in sport, and I don't like when the rules are being broken in construction.

This will go a long way to addressing that. Our legislation would help construction employers be com-

petitive in the marketplace when bidding on those jobs. I think everybody would agree that we should play by the rules, that somebody on one side of the street who has a company, as compared to somebody on the other side of the street—they all should have a fair shake at being able to get a contract. But especially in these challenging economic times, there are some who will cut corners. There are some who will look at ways to be able to undermine a system that is in place, a system that has worked, as I said, for construction workers for close to 100 years. We want to make sure that we strengthen that system, that we protect those workers, that we address their safety in the workplace and that we make sure those companies, those good players, are playing on a level playing field.

Importantly, our bill provides WSIB insurance coverage to those who are not covered by the system and who may have no insurance in the event of a workplace injury. This is very important, because at the heart of this, we want to make sure that all workers are protected. In the past, there have been workers who have gone into a work site and maybe have thought that their employer was paying their premiums, or at times, with some of these employers or companies that are using these nefarious practices, have been told—even though this worker has been with that company for one, two, five, 10 years—“You’ve got to come into the company as an independent operator. We don’t want to pay those premiums.” Well, that worker gets injured and finds themselves in a tough situation—a tragic story for many workers.

The WSIB at this time will still make sure that that worker gets benefits, because this is about the worker. At the centre of all of this is making sure that we protect them. We will go after that unscrupulous employer who has done this, but we will make sure that that worker will receive benefits. This is something that we want to address. But while that worker is receiving benefits, there has been no payment into the WSIB system for all that time. This is creating difficulties for the system, for the WSIB. There is revenue leakage. Others have been paying for that individual and for those companies that are not playing by the rules. We want to make sure that those monies are paid up and that everybody who is working on a construction site is paying their premiums. Our proposed legislation will act as a needed financial safety net for individuals and their families who might otherwise be unprotected.

Today, an independent operator does not have to be covered by the WSIB or insurance. I know many of us here have heard the stories in this chamber or in our constituency offices. We’ve had some of these workers come into our offices and say: “What do I do now? I’m injured. I’ve hurt my hand. I can’t use a hammer any longer. I can’t use the tools. I don’t have another skill.” They find themselves in a very precarious situation. We don’t want those stories; we don’t want those tragedies. We want to make sure that we continue to have that safety net, that we take care of these workers who are building that needed infrastructure in all our communi-

ties. It could be hospitals, shopping malls, homes, bridges, pipes, sewers. It doesn’t matter; they are all out there.

I have to say that within the construction sector there are many risks. There are risks when you are 20 storeys up on a condo site. There are risks when you are on top of a very peaked roof and you are a roofer. Accidents do happen. We want to make sure, if that accident does happen, that worker and their family know that they are protected.

For those in construction who are faced with a workplace injury, WSIB coverage will mean compensation for loss of earnings at 85% of pre-injury net earnings; payment of health care costs, including services not covered by OHIP; non-economic loss awards for permanent injuries; and compensation for loss of retirement income at age 65. These are a lot of benefits that go a long way and give those workers peace of mind.

1610

I say “workers,” but it helps the employers, it helps the employees, it helps all Ontarians know that we have a system in place here that is world-class, that deals with health and safety, that deals with fairness, and makes sure that we are compassionate.

We understand that there are some on the other side of the aisle here who would rather get rid of all regulations, get rid of all rules—a *laissez-faire* attitude: “Let it go. Let it be.” We don’t feel that’s right. It would not help those workers on the worksite. It would not protect them. We want to make sure that they are protected. It is something, I believe, that is fundamental to Ontario.

We have, as I said, over 400,000 workers working in this sector. That is a substantial number of Ontarians that we want to make sure, at the end of the day, at the end of their shift, can go home to their families. We’ve heard all too often of injuries that take place on construction sites, and sometimes fatalities.

Now, that may seem like just a number to some people, but for us, it’s a father, it’s a mother, it’s an uncle, it’s an aunt, it’s a son, it’s a daughter who may not be coming home, who may have gone to hospital. We want to limit the number of those calls that come from the police or fire service or an employer saying, “Your son has been injured. He’s in the hospital. It’s critical.” Those are the calls that affect all of us.

To make sure that we can limit those calls and not see those tragic stories, we want to make sure that we address it through a system that we should all be proud of, a system that we’ve built up to defend, to help build an economy here on our infrastructure, and make sure that those workers—many of them, I know, are in my family; my family has many construction workers. I know that I feel peace of mind, even though it costs some dollars. It costs dollars; insurance is not free. It costs dollars; it costs premiums. Yes, but they are dollars well spent for peace of mind, for peace of mind to know that my uncle who works in construction—if, God forbid, he gets injured—is covered. If the injury is so severe that he will not be able to work again, he is covered. This is a measure that will go a long way to being able to do that.

Our government has listened to stakeholders and received valuable input in response to the Ministry of Labour's consultation on mandatory WSIB coverage. Actually, there has been consultation for over 15 years. The last consultation on WSIB coverage in the construction sector was in June 2006. I want to thank my predecessors for the work they've done on this file. In that particular consultation, under Minister Bentley, the ministry received 371 submissions on the proposal, from all different types of business—small, medium and large; from labour groups; from employers; from employees. We listened to all of those stakeholders, and our proposed legislation reflects what they had to say.

There are some cases where you may have a casual worker. I've heard of individuals who help seniors out and do jobs like fixing the kitchen sink or coming in and doing an electrical outlet, where they have to do a little bit of work or fix something on the back porch. Our bill would provide an exemption from mandatory coverage for those individuals who exclusively perform home renovation work on an existing residence and are retained directly by the occupant, such as the homeowner or a family member. As I said, individuals who do home reno and may come in to fix a hole or do a little bit of work around the house would be exempt from this legislation—and they would have to be retained by the homeowner or the owner of the property.

It is our intent that if the proposed amendments are passed, they would be fully implemented by 2012. The 2012 time frame, which is about three years out, is based on the WSIB making the technical and administrative changes that would be necessary to address this proposed legislation, and to speak with construction stakeholders about how the proposed changes would be implemented. They have to update and modernize their IT systems, because what they're going to bring forward is what is called a clearance certificate. When this is fully implemented, when somebody retains a subcontractor or someone coming onto a site, the person who is hiring those people would have to make sure they are WSIB-covered, that their premiums are all paid and that they are in good standing with the WSIB.

We have also looked at how other provinces deal with this issue. Four provinces—Alberta, a Conservative province, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan—require some form of mandatory coverage for independent operators. We have also listened to construction stakeholders who are concerned, as we are, about combating the underground economy. Often we talk about timing. Well, this is the right time, because in these challenging times we want to make sure we protect and help the good players who are out there, those who are playing by the rules.

Some may want to protect the bad actors, those who are not playing by the rules, those who are not paying the premiums, those who are not looking after the welfare of their employees—their health and safety. They may not feel as strongly as I do about the principle of fairness. We have listened to these people. We want to make sure we

combat that underground economic activity—as I said, \$2 billion in revenue we shouldn't be losing that could go a long way invested in long-term-care homes, schools and hospitals.

Our system of mandatory coverage will help us assure that, subject to this bill, independent operators are registered within the WSIB system. This connection to the workers' compensation system, in conjunction with other programs, such as the Canada Revenue Agency, will help to identify those who may be working in the underground economy—one of the ways to stem the underground economy.

Our proposed bill will help us realize the McGuinty government's goal of promoting healthier, safer and fairer workplaces. We want to make sure we help those leaders, those champions out there; that when a worker comes on to the work site, they are wearing their hard hats, their safety goggles and their boots; that they are looking at the environment in terms of how they can address any potential hazards that are out there. These are the types of employers that we feel are helping build a strong Ontario. These are the types of employers that we should help and we should protect, and their employees know it. So we want to help more of these employers grow. We want to help their businesses. We want to make sure that they are the ones that are building our infrastructure, our homes, our condominiums, roads, and universities, because these are the good players. This is the right time for government to take these steps which will benefit all who work in Ontario's construction industry.

1620

I would hope that members in this House can see the light, understand the importance of this legislation and stem something that's been going on for too long. Level the playing field, address health and safety in the construction industry, which has its very unique characteristics, and make sure that we stem that underground economic activity.

At this time, I'd like to thank the members for listening to this proposal, to this legislation that I hope will pass here in this House and that all will support. I would like to allow my parliamentary assistant, Vic Dhillon, from the great riding of Brampton West, to share some words now with the members.

Mr. Vic Dhillon: I'm very happy and proud to rise and speak in support of the Workforce Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2008.

Everyone who works in our province's construction sector deserves the insurance protection that the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board coverage provides. Under this proposal, independent operators would be able to access extensive prevention services and products tailored to the construction industry through the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board and its system partners. For example, the Construction Safety Association of Ontario provides health and safety training and service support to all construction organizations, as well as to new registrants.

Those who work in our province's construction industry also deserve the safer work practices that our bill will help foster. Under this proposal, individuals who would be required to register with the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board would also now be eligible for WSIB prevention, education and communications materials. As well, these individuals will be entitled to materials and training provided by the Construction Safety Association of Ontario, which is funded through WSIB premiums. Also, once in the WSIB system, injuries are more likely to be reported, which will help both WSIB and the Ministry of Labour to track unsafe worksites and work practices in the construction industry.

I support this bill because it will help us monitor our province's workplaces so we can better direct safety efforts and enforce our laws where these efforts will be best put to use. It is time for this bill, because it will help us to combat the underground economy that makes construction employers who play by the rules less competitive. It is time to help those who play by the rules. The underground economy in the construction industry also presents a challenge in enforcing compliance with health and safety standards. As well, it undermines labour standards and erodes construction quality, putting workers and the public at risk.

I am in favour of this proposed legislation because it has been drafted with stakeholder input. This input led to exemptions in the home renovations field for individuals who exclusively perform home renovation work on an existing residence and are retained directly by the occupant, such as the homeowner or a family member. Both the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario and the Council of Ontario Construction Associations have given the Ministry of Labour important input on this initiative, through consultations and discussions.

This bill is about protection: protection in health and safety, protection for those injured on the job and protection for the construction employers who pay their fair share. We want our province to be the place that sets the example for the rest of the world in workplace health and safety. This bill is simply the right thing for government to do.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I listened with interest to the presentation this afternoon by the Minister of Labour and his parliamentary assistant with respect to Bill 119, but I didn't hear either one of them make reference to the concerns that have been expressed by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business.

Today, I think all MPPs received a letter from Judith Andrew, who is the vice-president, Ontario, of the CFIB. I've known Ms. Andrew for all the years that I have been here in this Legislature, going back about 18 years, and have always found her to be a very fair-minded and constructive advocate for the small businesses in Ontario, willing to work with the government of the day if she feels she's making some measure of progress in terms of the government responding appropriately.

In reading the letter that she sent to the Minister of Labour, which I understand has been copied to all members of this House, I think the strongly worded expression of concern that she has given us bears repeating in this House in the context of this debate.

She says to the Minister of Labour that: "In our long experience, we have dealt with legislators who put forward seriously misguided policies. The WSIB mandatory coverage legislation you tabled today falls squarely in that category. It will not level the playing field; on the contrary, it will tilt it in favour of large, unionized constructors. It will fail to get at the underground economy; present lawbreakers will no doubt evade the new law and dive deeper underground."

She continues: "Most politicians we know are genuinely interested in doing their best for Ontarians. There may be disagreement on what the best is, but at least their motives are pure. We believe that your motivation, on behalf of your government, has far more to do with political opportunism than it does with the policy at hand. This is a shame for Ontario. Shame on you."

I would ask the Minister of Labour to respond to these comments when he has a chance to—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Kormos: I should indicate to folks that in around an hour's time—that will be around 5:30—the NDP WSIB critic, Paul Miller, from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, will be beginning his one-hour lead comments on this bill.

New Democrats believe, of course, that every worker in this province should have access to WSIB coverage. Really, the issues of concern around this are going to be best addressed in committee, and I'm confident that the bill is going to go to committee and that there will be an opportunity for folks who have concerns to raise them in committee. But I've got to say that this one was a relatively easy one for the Minister of Labour. If he's arguing, and I believe he is, that workers should have access to WSIB coverage, why doesn't he take on the financial institutions? Why doesn't he take on the banks, the call centres, where RSI—repetitive strain injury—is rife, especially among older workers, those workers around my age, perhaps a little younger, people who work, yes indeed, at screens and keyboards and have RSI, carpal tunnel syndrome.

If you, like I, talk to a worker from, let's say, Canadian Tire Acceptance down in Welland, a woman who is 50, 55 years old who has developed painful, debilitating carpal tunnel syndrome, you have the unenviable role of explaining to her that this government won't give her access to WSIB coverage and she's on her own. So I say to the minister, this one was an easy one. Show us you've got the right stuff. Show us you've got the royal jelly. Take on the banks, the financial institutions. Bring them into WSIB too.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. David Zimmer: This is a very good piece of legislation for a couple of reasons. Let me just walk you through about three of them.

First of all, there are many workers out there in the construction business, typically on this home renovation stuff, who are working long hours, typically at low wages, and the employer is not paying their premium. When they are injured, they're on their own. They are not able to access all the insurance provided by the WSIB; they're not able to access all the rehabilitation programs and all that, because they've never been a part of that WSIB world.

1630

The fact of the matter is, with the huge number of immigrants in the GTA, an unusually large proportion of new immigrant workers find themselves, through their own circumstances, caught up in this weekend construction/home renovation trade. They've just arrived, they've got some skills and they are anxious to make some money to provide for their families, and they get caught up in this home renovation piece and are not treated as fairly as other workers engaged by responsible employers, who see that they have appropriate coverage under the WSIB. So we have a situation where we have two classes of workers: a class who can access everything the WSIB provides and a class who are excluded. What this legislation is going to do is level the playing field. It's going to bring those hard-working people into the system. This is good legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I just want to put the viewing audience on notice that I'm here today not just as the whip but primarily to listen to the speech by our critic the member from Sarnia-Lambton, Mr. Bailey. He's very knowledgeable, has worked in industry all his life and knows the rules.

What I hear being talked about today, in short-term phraseology, is a tax on small business, a typical Liberal strategy to whack them. But what is really more troubling to me is that there have been no details released recently on the review of the WSIB. I'd like to know the details. What is their unfunded liability? It's astronomical. What are they doing? They're reaching into more peoples' pockets to get themselves out of debt. That's the solution. It's a tax on jobs. That's what it is, and it's frightening. In this time of the economy going south, taxes are going up.

Some I have heard in the back corridors are saying—I'm not sure exactly what they're referring to; it's sort of like the grassy knoll theory—that actually this should be called payback for the working families of Ontario. I'm—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Will the member for Durham take his seat. We're going to think about how we say these things in a parliamentary way. For you for the rest of the day, I'd appreciate that.

Mr. John O'Toole: You're right. I do become emotional every time I see taxes going up and there's no accountability. The WSIB, at one time, had about six

review boards that refused to pay injured workers, and now we're talking about injured workers who may not be covered in the future—these NEL and FEL programs. Injured workers deserve to be covered, and I don't hear that in this bill. I hear it as a tax on small business.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Minister, you have two minutes to respond.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I want to thank the member for Durham, the member for Willowdale, the member for Welland and the member for Wellington-Halton Hills.

I'll start with the member for Durham, just to address his comments. It seems that he wants to focus on Sarnia. I'll tell you what somebody from Sarnia, Doug Chalmers, the director of Aluma Systems, said about this legislation: "Congratulations. Absolutely brilliant. This will make Ontario a safer workplace and improve the quality of life for all of us." That's from Sarnia.

Thank you very much to the member from Willowdale for advocating, as always, for vulnerable workers and making sure that Ontario's workers are taken care of—their health, their safety—and that there is fairness in the workplace.

I would like to address the comments by the member for Welland about underground industries. This proposed legislation, I say to the member, is due to the unique characteristics within construction. It can be very transient and there's a lot of mobility within the industry, and because of that, underground economic activity has been very difficult to address. This proposal will be able to do that. It will go a long way to addressing that underground economic activity in construction that does have many unique characteristics, as well as levelling that playing field and making sure that everybody is playing by the rules.

To the member for Wellington-Halton Hills, whom I highly respect, I have to say that at the heart of all this is the health and safety of Ontario workers; it's our number one priority. By not doing this, we are allowing those underground economic practices to fester, to threaten health and safety, to undermine labour standards and erode construction quality—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's a pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 119, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2008.

Interjections.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes, I'd like to speak to the letter from Doug Chalmers. Doug Chalmers happens to be a friend of mine. I spoke to Doug Chalmers last night. He called me from holiday in the west, and I had the opportunity to send the minister's briefing to him. He said, "This isn't what I thought was going to be in the bill when I sent that letter." So you're going to hear from Mr. Chalmers again.

Interjection.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I was talking to him last night, so you're going to hear from him again.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Order.

Mr. Robert Bailey: When this bill was introduced just yesterday, I said that our party had a number of objections to proceeding with this. First, this is a new tax on small business; second, this does nothing to get the WSIB cheats; and third, this tilts the playing field in favour of big business and big labour against small business.

The minister said yesterday that this bill is all about safety, levelling the playing field and combating the underground economy. What a bunch of nonsense. I'd say something else, but that wouldn't be parliamentary. Since the minister announced his intention on Friday the 17th, I have been inundated with calls and meetings from small business and large provincial organizations who think this bill is the wrong way to go.

I'd like to start with dissecting the minister's arguments in favour of this bill. Contrary to what the minister said, this bill does nothing to improve workers' safety in Ontario. If this bill were a serious attempt to make Ontario workplaces safer, the minister wouldn't be forcing it on tens of thousands of businesses who are already registered with the WSIB and who already get their services from the Construction Safety Association of Ontario and inspections by the Ministry of Labour.

The minister could, if he really wanted to, make Ontario workplaces safer by extending the construction safety association's services to those independent operators for a nominal charge, instead of charging them thousands of dollars. If the minister were serious about making our workplaces safer, he would completely remove the exemption for home renovations. Is the minister saying, with this bill, that people working in the home renovation sector don't deserve a safe workplace? I don't think so. He should care as much about the safety of a person rewiring someone's old house as he does about someone rewiring a new house or a new building. But at least he recognizes the impracticalities of getting at the cheaters in the reno business with this legislation.

How does this level the playing field? I don't believe it does, actually. I think this bill tilts the playing field in favour of big labour and big firms. Right now, both large and small construction companies have an exemption for their owners, directors and executive officers. They all play by those rules. No owner or executive officer pays premiums on their own earnings and haven't since workers' compensation originated. Now, if this goes through, all firms will have to pay for their owners, directors and executive officers. Removing this exemption places small firms at a tremendous disadvantage to large firms. Proportionally speaking, this is a much larger hit for a small firm than the larger businesses in Ontario.

It's very funny that the minister's own supporters don't believe that this is about levelling the playing field. Here's what the Council of Ontario Construction Associations said in 2006: "If this change is not made, eventually most construction work will be done with independent operators.... This will also reduce the contracts awarded to union companies who cannot use independent

operators. Non-action very much threatens the growth, and possibly the future, of union construction in Ontario."

To me, that doesn't sound like they want to level the playing field; it means they want to tilt the playing field in favour of big labour.

1640

If the minister is seriously concerned about fraudulent claims, he needs to scrap his idea and put his time, energy and resources into developing a named insurance system for the WSIB. I understand that it is complex, but governments do these things all the time. They can do it with CPP, they can do it with EI etc. I don't believe that wasting four years implementing this particular piece of legislation will be helpful to anyone.

Now let's talk about the underground economy. I don't think anyone in this Legislature would object to WSIB cracking down on people who are cheating the system. The WSIB and the Ministry of Labour already have the powers to crack down on cheats. They need to do more on it, and they need to get out of the office and into the field. They actually have to look for them. Everyone would support that. Cheaters cost legitimate companies money, and all legitimate companies would be supportive of the government cracking down on them.

For the House leader's information, I did speak to Doug Chalmers. The member from—

Interjection: He's the whip.

Mr. Robert Bailey: The whip?

Interjection: Yes.

Mr. Robert Bailey: The Liberal whip, the government whip. He's not listening. Anyway, he was talking about Doug—he's otherwise engaged.

Just yesterday, David McDonald from the Open Shop Contractors Association said in a press release: "This will force legitimate guys to go illegitimate. To solve the problem, all the WSIB has to do is more audits of small contractors."

Right now, independent operators have to register with the WSIB as independent operators. The first people who are going to be impacted by this piece of legislation are those in the above-ground economy, not the underground economy. The WSIB and their people already know who the legitimate employers are because they're registered with them already, which actually raises an interesting question. The Minister of Labour has said that this bill will take four years to implement. I was told in my briefing from his staff that this is because it would take the bureaucracy at the WSIB two years to update their IT system. Maybe they should get some new people in to do that.

I found this odd since the WSIB already has the capacity and regularly registers independent operators and actually offers voluntary coverage. So if they already can register and track independent operators, why do they need to take so long updating their IT system? I have a feeling that this delay in implementing may have more to do with getting past the next election, before the new tax

on small business kicks in, than it does with giving the WSIB time—

Interjection: The Minister of Labour is leaving.

Mr. Robert Bailey: We'll talk to him tomorrow. This won't be the last he'll hear from me.

The people who are impacted immediately by this bill—the House leader wasn't here when I commented on—

Interjection: He's the whip.

Mr. Robert Bailey: The whip. Sorry.

I had that read back to me yesterday by the minister, about Mr. Chalmers. Well, as I said earlier—when you weren't here—Mr. Chalmers and I spoke as late as last night. He said, "That's not what I understood the bill was going to be when I sent that letter." I sent him a copy of the briefing, so you're probably going to be hearing from Mr. Chalmers and a lot of other employers who had another understanding of what the bill would be. I won't use another word.

Interjection: They were misguided.

Mr. Robert Bailey: They were misguided.

The people who are impacted immediately by this bill are those who are already registered with the WSIB and paying premiums for their employees and those independent operators already certified to pay premiums. Both of those groups are the above-ground economy.

Who is underground? The ministry and the WSIB already have the tools that they need to crack down on the underground economy, and they don't want to use them. They want to go after the low-hanging fruit for the quick hit of the premiums.

This reminds me of another way of taxing. I think that's where the banks got that idea for "hands in your pockets." I'm sure they must have been overhearing some caucus meetings, and they must have figured that out when they ran that commercial.

The other issue we hear a lot about is how this bill, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, makes sure everyone plays by the rules. Again, I would point out that the people who are impacted by this are already playing by the rules, and the rules are the same for everybody. What the minister is doing with this bill is changing the rules from a system that has been in place for these employers and workers for almost a hundred years. This will force business owners to pay those premiums.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has been remarkably consistent on this issue for years. I think the government and the government members would be wise to listen to them, because every one of the government members and the members on this side of the House have small businesses in their riding. They are, in fact, the only sector that's probably going to see us through this recession that we're into. So I think we should do everything we can to encourage their operation, work with them and not bring in more taxes. That's what this is, essentially.

For years now, the CFIB has been telling you to get your inspectors out of their offices and to go out and find

the cheats and enforce the rules we have now. These cheats are hurting all law-abiding businesses and need to be caught.

Minister, if you or your staff can't enforce the current laws, why should we assume that by giving you this new bill, you can enforce any new ones? I don't believe this is about stamping out the underground economy at all.

I will let others comment on what they believe this is really about. I have here a letter I'd like to read into the record. It's addressed to the Honourable Peter Fonesca, Minister of Labour.

"Dear Mr. Fonseca,

"In our long experience, we have dealt with legislators who put forward seriously misguided policies. The WSIB mandatory coverage legislation you tabled today falls squarely in that category. It will not level the playing field; on the contrary, it will tilt in in favour of large, unionized constructors. It will fail to get at the underground economy; present lawbreakers will no doubt evade the new law, and dive deeper underground. It will not make one iota of difference on health and safety; companies with employees already have access to services from the safety association. What it will do is penalize the above-ground operators, who are already subsidizing the cheats, by requiring them to increase premiums"—and they've estimated this to be as much as \$11,000 per year per operator—"in respect of their owners, officers and directors."

Interjection: It's a new tax.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes, it is a new tax. We were promised by the Premier and the finance minister that there would be no new taxes in this budget. This is just another way of doing that.

"And, it will expose the WSIB to the nightmare of more unfounded claims from individuals who, in fact, are their own employer, and who will decide for themselves whether and for how long to claim benefits, perhaps even retire on that system.

"What is unprecedented about your actions today is the level of betrayal of small and medium-sized business. Your government's commitment ... to a 'named-insured' approach to catching cheaters was not fulfilled; even though it was engineered to falter, it wasn't concluded. Your failure to consult with CFIB, to even await your first meeting with us, before announcing your intentions can only be described as incredibly poor form. Your pleasant phone message indicating that as a brand new minister you wanted to work with CFIB, belied your involvement in making a secret deal on mandatory coverage with" these people. "Springing this terrible announcement on hard-working small business people during Small Business Month, at a time when the economic outlook is shaky, is incredibly insensitive. Your seemingly cocky, uncaring attitude to the 25,000 action alerts that we delivered from our members was distressing. And, we see it as, frankly, dishonest, that you equivocated, as recently as last Thursday, concerning your schedule for introduction and passage of the legislation.

"Most politicians we know are genuinely interested in doing their best for Ontarians. There may be a disagree-

ment on what the best is, but at least their motives are pure. We believe that your motivation, on behalf of your government, has far more to do with political opportunism than it does with the policy at hand. This is a shame for Ontario. Shame on you.

"Yours truly,

"Judith Andrew

"Vice-president, Ontario."

This legislation allows cheaters to prosper, while cracking down on the good guys. The day after this bill is enacted, WSIB will ask the above-ground operators to pay more on their owners, officers and directors. The bad guys in the underground economy aren't going to surface any time soon. In the meantime, this new category of covered individuals opens the WSIB to abuse of claims. This is the reason that, for EI purposes federally, leaders of companies—owners, officers etc.—aren't allowed to participate. No sane government would allow someone to lay himself off. Likewise, they shouldn't allow someone to decide whether they are injured or not.

1650

If someone in the owner, officer, director or independent operator category has decided to break the law by posing as an employee when he is injured, how will changing the law affect that lawbreaker? Chances are, the lawbreaker will have no qualms about continuing to break the law. The only check on that would be to insure the employees by name, so that only a named employee could later lodge a claim for benefits. Tighter administration will get at the cheating. A change to the law will see lawbreakers scoffing at the change and continuing their bad ways.

This is why we believe on this side of the House that the government shouldn't waste their time on this type of program when their energy and resources should be spent on creating a named insurance system so that we know exactly who is covered and who is not. The minister has stated that he believes that this bill will provide WSIB coverage to non-protected workers. We don't believe that to be the case.

I'd also like to read a number of e-mails that were provided to me from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. These are people's own stories.

"I have a hard enough time keeping my company running without increasing my costs. My guess is that, should my husband or I get injured and attempt to make a WSIB claim (should we be forced to pay premiums on ourselves), the likelihood of the claim being paid out would be slim.... I cannot afford any more expenses with regards to my business. I hardly pay myself as it is."

Another one: "This is a very serious issue that could undermine many legitimate businesses. Please put forth every effort that is possible to fight this potential threat from destroying the lifeblood of our construction industry. Why is the construction category being targeted so badly?"

"I already pay for my own coverage through insurance policies which work out to be cheaper in the long run with better coverage."

"Allow independent operators to provide a private insurance plan in lieu of an inefficient WSIB plan. This would be less costly and provide better disability coverage."

"We are strongly opposed to the mandatory WSIB coverage in construction. This will do nothing to help the underground economy—only weaken honest companies."

"They are an insurance product. If there is a problem it should be addressed. Employees are abusing the system. If we crush the so-called underground economy there will be no incentive for companies" to do a good job.

There's another one: "This is nothing more than a cash grab from WSIB, and I have a bad feeling it will go through. Our particular industry, the HVAC-R, is getting legislated to death, with very expensive certification being rammed down our throats from TSSA. With the loss of so much industry in Ontario, the still-healthy construction sector is attracting the attention of cash-hungry government divisions. This group can and is largely covered by private disability insurance, and that's enough."

So you see, Mr. Speaker, and to the people listening tonight in the TV audience out there, this is an issue that we're going to have to keep pushing. I say that when our members go back to our ridings on the weekend and subsequent weekends, and the government members—all the opposition as well—we're going to be hearing, I'm sure, from our small business people, who are struggling every day to provide jobs in their community. You'll have to answer to your people; I know I'll have no problem answering to mine.

Here's another e-mail: "Ontario is one of the most expensive places to do business. The government is driving people out of business or forcing them to move with excessive regulation. We do not have secure electricity at a reasonable price. We are already considering moving; this would make our exit almost assured."

"Inefficient and slow moving. WSIB places too much responsibility on the employers following an injury ... (letters offering light duty etc.) It does not respond promptly to the needs of injured workers."

"How including more people in this would help this, we're not sure."

Another one: "Just another nail in the coffin for small companies already working 12 to 14 hours per day trying to keep bills paid. (Reminds me of the latest advertisement showing someone with their hand in your pocket.)" I think the member from Welland spoke about that, but anyway.

"This is a principle argument—owners cannot (nor would they want to) collect WSIB benefits—why should we pay the premiums? We can't collect EI either, but we're not required to pay those premiums."

"Only the businesses that are already complying with the law will be harmed by this," because they are the first businesses that the minister and his labour department will go after.

Another one simply says three words: "I am outraged." I'm sure he speaks for a number of people in the small business sector throughout Ontario.

"We do not need more government taxes from one of the public bodies with some of the highest-paid civil servants already."

Another one: "We will cease business...."

"There are a lot of people collecting WSIB who should not be. The agencies should spend some of their staff time going after these" people instead of going after the people who make the jobs.

Another one: "Please do not allow this to happen.... It will just penalize legitimate companies ... those that are under the radar will continue to be there."

"Our firm is a medium-sized company and all employees contribute to WSIB with the exception of one. My concern will be for the 'mom and pop' company that will in no way be able to include this increase in their pricing."

"WSIB cannot be used as a 'tool' to manage the construction industry. It is a 'benefit' to those who choose to follow its guidelines."

"Good luck. The current system is punitive, expensive and unfair to legitimate contractors. It is also incredibly unfair."

Another new one: "This is possibly the worst news I have heard in quite a while. If this indeed happens, it will very negatively affect the building industry and the economy as a whole. Fight like crazy to do away with this proposal."

"Requiring mandatory coverage for executive officers, directors and for that matter office staff (most of whom rarely if ever set foot on a construction site) is just plain dumb. Whose 'brilliant' idea was that?"

"Implementing mandatory WSIB is another direct hit on small businesses and will do nothing"—nothing—"to prevent the underground economy. How is beating up on registered employers going to help the situation? My advice? Make it really easy to get coverage. Make the price reasonable and everyone will want coverage."

"If I can deduct all construction cost from my personal income tax these cheaters will be out of business because they would have to issue a receipt."

Mr. John Yakabuski: What's with the clock?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'm done already, am I?

Mr. John O'Toole: No, you've got time.

Mr. Robert Bailey: "WSIB has been a typical government-run organization with more inefficiencies than efficiencies. Private insurance is a fraction of the cost. Perhaps it should be mandatory that you prove that you have private insurance in lieu of WSIB. That would save billions."

"I'd like to know where the thousands of dollars our company pays annually" go now. We are accident-free and pay a high premium. The reporting to WSIB is time-consuming and frustrating, as we have to enforce WSIB certificates for every trade we use."

I won't say this next one.

"We are classified as construction-related and yet we are never on a construction site. The policies of WSIB are not uniformly applied."

"Independent operators and owner-driven companies are the least likely folks to ever file a ... claim, largely because of the entrepreneurial spirit required to drive a company in the construction sector. If this legislation passes, there should be a total exemption for companies with fewer than 10 employees."

"If passed, it will cause more harm than good. Very bad idea."

"Many owners are now covered 24/7 with our own private coverage which covers us at work and also on our down time; this coverage is far better than" anything we can get from "workplace insurance."

"Please help us before we all get out of the construction industry. We are taxed to the limit, and I am having a hard time to carry on. Thinking of getting out of this and moving back to England after 34 years here in Canada. Our taxes are" way "too high ... it's hard to make a living here."

"I cannot believe that the government plans to make WSIB mandatory! It is like a farmer supplementing his farm income off-farm and having to pay EI" because "they are self-employed and will never be unemployed, so therefore will never collect" any "insurance."

"The whole thing is ridiculous; in order to stop the underground economy, the government continues to penalize legal contractors" and businessmen. "Increase fines and enforcement for cheaters, advertise to homeowners about the risks of underground contractors, to catch" these cheats.

1700

"We pay for superior private insurance with coverage 24/7."

"My brother and I own the business. If we were to get hurt, we cannot go on compensation or we would go out of business. The WSIB is just taking advantage of company officials. The private coverage is cheaper and covers us 24/7, not just at work" but when we're at home or on vacation. "How about investigating the people on WSIB that can go fishing, hunting, play baseball ... but cannot go to work?..."

"We believe that putting premiums on owners/directors of construction firms or any firms will cause more underground economy than before. Many companies, ours included, would go out of business if this happens. Prices would have to go up." We would have to try to pass it on to the consumers. "The general public has only so many dollars to go around. Trust CFIB can" work to "get this stopped."

We "pay too much as it is now. Never filed a claim in 15 years... another excuse for gov't money grab...."

"Mandatory WSIB premiums for our management staff will be a very big blow to our" small "business. We will have to make drastic changes," possibly "layoffs, etc." to our office staff. "Please stop this slamming those already above board and who are doing their best to comply with the current laws."

Those are the low-hanging fruit we spoke about that they're going to go after first and not do the heavy lifting it takes.

Mr. Peter Shurman: They've never been a small business.

Mr. Robert Bailey: That's right. There probably isn't anyone who's been in small business, who understands.

"As a family business, we carry separate coverage and are covered 24 hours a day."

"This change in legislation is the one regulatory threat that could put me out of business. As an above-ground operator that associates with truly independent contractors this change could/would make me uncompetitive with the underground operators that operate today and will operate in greater numbers if this goes through. WSIB coverage is unwanted and ineffective insurance."

It is. It's a very small business.

If the minister were sincere about that, he wouldn't be targeting owners in business; he wouldn't be targeting people who have to work even when they are hurt and can't get the full benefit of WSIB coverage even though they are paying for it. The minister also wouldn't be forcing these executives and directors to give up what they have now—24/7, 365-days-a-year coverage that they pay for separately, for a more expensive coverage that won't offer them nearly as much protection. This bill is all about tilting the playing field, and it's not going to be levelled.

I am also concerned that this bill places the owners of small construction companies in tremendous conflicts of interest. The WSIB now relies on the owners of these companies to basically do their paperwork when there's an injury of an employee. What will happen, if this bill is passed, when the owner is one of the injured? How does he or she do this paperwork? I think this inadvertently, and I'm sure that the ministry and the government haven't thought about this—

Mr. John O'Toole: They'll fine them for being late.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes, they'll fine them for not doing the paperwork right.

I think that this puts them in a very difficult spot.

Since the minister announced his intention to introduce this bill on October 17, I have had a few people raising some very interesting questions. The first was that the big construction companies are afraid of the tiniest of all the many firms competing for construction contracts. They had better re-examine their business strategy. It's not like these independent operators can compete to build a condo tower in downtown Toronto. I don't see them as much of a threat.

People, particularly small business owners, have a problem understanding how the playing field isn't already level. No one, large or small, pays WSIB premiums for their owners, directors and executive officers. Again, if the big firms can't compete with these smaller firms, who follow exactly the same rules, I would suggest that they probably have other problems.

Recently, the honourable member for Parry Sound—Muskoka and I met—

Mr. John O'Toole: An excellent member.

Mr. Robert Bailey: An excellent member, doing an excellent job in Parry Sound—Muskoka, as are all the members on this side of the House—

Interjection.

Mr. Robert Bailey: —and all the House too, I know.

Recently, the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka and I met with the Ontario Road Builders' Association to talk about this issue with them. They are a large construction association and they raised some very interesting concerns. The Ontario Road Builders' Association is not supporting the government on this bill, despite the fact that they are comfortable with the idea of mandatory coverage for the WSIB. What they told us is that if the bill mandates coverage for executive directors and officers of a construction company, they are against it, and that's what this bill, as it's presently written, does. If this bill exempts home renovators, they are against it, and that's what this bill does.

These same people, this organization that represents many hundreds of people and businesses, they told us that if this bill is implemented as written, it will cost these road builders alone—their owners and their members—upwards of \$30 million. This is money that will have to come straight out of municipal infrastructure projects because, as you know, businesses don't pay tax; they pass it on to their customers.

The government likes to brag about how much money they're investing in infrastructure. But if this bill, their own bill, passes as it is written, this will cost \$30 million out of money earmarked for roads and bridges in all of the members' ridings: government, opposition, third party. So we need to think about this. When we go back and meet our municipal leaders, we'll have to explain why we're going to, as a minimum, take at least \$30 million that would have built a road or a bridge or a sewer project in a town—we'll have to say, "Oh, that money has gone to the bureaucracy in some dark hole in Toronto."

Mr. John Yakabuski: Hy's Steakhouse.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Hy's Steakhouse, yes; the—what do you call that bar, the Martini Ranch?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Steve Mahoney will be having a big party.

Mr. Robert Bailey: But if this bill passes, it will take money out of this. Money earmarked for roads and bridges will go straight back to the government bureaucracy at the WSIB.

As the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka pointed out last week—a great member doing a great job there—when the government made their announcement of the intention to introduce this bill, it was Small Business Week. Imagine the irony of this. This is the week when we are all to celebrate the success of small businesses, and what does the government do, and this minister? He introduces this bill—another tax grab. How does the McGuinty government celebrate small business? They announce a tax hike for every small business in Ontario that's involved in construction. Hands in your pockets.

No one should be fooled about this bill—maybe the member from Renfrew can do a little tune on that for us. No one should be fooled about this bill; this bill will be one of the biggest tax increases ever levied on small businesses in Ontario. If implemented as written, it may put many of them out of business. But we intend to work on this side of the House to see that it's not implemented as written. We're going to press for committee hearings and we're going to take this across the province and encourage people to come and speak and they'll be meeting with the government members from all of these rural ridings and from these small towns, and the small business people—they'll have to explain, when they go back to their ridings, why they're supporting something like this.

No one should be fooled about this bill. This bill will be one of the biggest tax increases—we're going to work on the figures to find out how much—if it's implemented as written. It may put many of them out of business. I can't imagine that they're doing this honestly.

When we're talking about the CFIB—I know I heard some people scoffing at their numbers. But anyway, just some stats: The Canadian Federation of Independent Business—an organization that I know all of us in the House know, because they represent businesses in all of our ridings. They represent over 42,000 employers, and this represents over 50% of the actual employment in the province of Ontario. Think about that, members of this House: When you're dumping on small business and adding extra costs, you're actually dumping on someone who's employing—when we're in these economic times, the records show that we've lost 230,000, 250,000 manufacturing jobs. The rest of the jobs—why are we chasing these out of Ontario? Three other ministers prior to this, ministers of labour, looked at this and refused to do it. This minister has only been in office less than a month and he's trying to put this through. I think that we need—

Mr. John Yakabuski: He should have waited until he figured out what he's doing.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Maybe. I've had comments from the side.

I'd like to just read here—all of the different parties had to respond to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business during the last election. The reply from the Liberal Party to the CFIB: "We will continue to work with you and work for fairness as we look for the best ways to tackle the underground economy."

Mr. John Yakabuski: But they're going to drive more of these people underground.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Exactly, as the member says.

So that's why the WSIB—the CFIB; all these acronyms. That's why they're so disappointed. They thought there'd be consultation; there hasn't been. The week of small business, when we were honouring small business people and the hard work that those men and women do, lots of them mom-and-pop operations, some of them smaller—when we're trying to honour them, this is like a slap in the face. I know that all the members—I've got

that letter—are going to get that letter. Believe me, we've been in contact with them. They're going to hear a lot more, because in many of these cities—in Welland, Toronto, St. Catharines—all these places where they've lost manufacturing jobs—Windsor—the small business sector is the one sector of the economy that's still thriving, still trying to do a good job, and here we are, going to saddle them with more bureaucracy.

I spoke to a restaurant owner—

Mr. John Yakabuski: More taxes.

1710

Mr. Robert Bailey: More taxes.

I spoke to a restaurant owner here just recently, two weeks ago now. He told me that he had an auditor come to his place—a government auditor for the PST—and he spent five weeks; it was over tax on draft beer. At the end of the day, he was fined \$1,800, and he had no appeal. He tried to say, "Well, it should be on the retail, not the wholesale," and the auditor said, "Look, I've heard all these arguments before. That's what it is and that's the end of it." What did that cost them? The small business operator also had his audit fees because he had to pay his own auditor. When he should have been cooking meals in the restaurant and managing his business, he was spending time with this auditor. The government auditor's own wages—for five weeks, he spent time at these small businesses.

Mr. John Yakabuski: He didn't sleep in his car, either.

Mr. Robert Bailey: He didn't sleep in his car, either, and he probably wasn't paying mileage. These business people—they're just struggling.

Another has to do with the Ministry of Labour. I spoke with a Mr. Chris Cook, who owns a printing business. He prints over 100,000 flyers, and they go for export, over to the United States, for inserts in newspapers. He had a Ministry of Labour inspector come to his site one day. He deemed that one of his printing presses was hooked up illegally and tagged it out. Mr. Cook, at that time, scrambled around and finally found an electrician to come in and make those necessary repairs. It was after-hours, of course. He shut him down for nine hours. Mr. Cook attempted to get the inspector, or any inspector, to come back and allow him to un-tag it so that he could print his inserts.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Gone on holiday.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Well, he finally got one. He knew somebody's home number or a friend of a friend. Anyway, these are the kinds of things—these people make these kinds of rules and make these kinds of judgments, and they don't understand. This man has a payroll of about \$2 million a year. He employs pretty near 100 people—good-paying jobs, and they rely on these jobs. It's small-town Ontario. It's located in Wyoming. He's in importing and exporting, and everyone understands the criticality of just-in-time delivery. If you don't have the grocery insert for the paper the next day, you're SOL, right? You're not going to get that contract the next time when—

Mr. Peter Kormos: SOL: Is that with periods or is that—

Mr. Peter Shurman: What's SOL, Bob?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'm dropping back on my days when I was on the shop floor.

I was listening to the minister. I'll just comment on it; it made me think of it. He was going on—

Interjection.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes, Mr. Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): You can't say indirectly what you can't say directly.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I've got to watch it here. I guess I'd better be careful.

Mr. Peter Kormos: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Down where I come from, SOL means "sweet out of luck."

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): In that case, continue.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes, thank you very much. I owe you for that one. I wouldn't want to do anything to call into disrepute the integrity and the honesty of this august assembly.

I was listening to the minister—

Interjection.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Stop talking? Yes, maybe I should sit down and shut up.

Anyway, the minister alluded to his time in sports when he was running around the track, and fairness and all of that. It made me think about—my father was in small business—

Mr. John Yakabuski: On the track, he didn't know how to make a left or a right. He kept on going.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes, left or right. He kept going and going and going, like that Energizer bunny.

Anyway, I worked with my father; I was fortunate enough to work with him in small business. He worked every day. He wore overalls to work every day of his life. I worked with him after hours and on Saturdays when I was 14 and 15 years old. I wasn't good enough to be in sport either, but that's what I was doing when I was growing up. I went to school, I went right out and went to work. I worked in the construction industry, so I take a little bit of offence when some people try to imply that we don't care about worker safety. I worked in industry and worked in the construction sector; then I went to work for one of the major petrochemical firms.

Workplace health and safety—I know, Mr. Speaker, as you do as well, that they have great programs, because I helped administer them. I finally worked my way up into management, and I was responsible for a number of those workers. I had to have meetings; I brought people in when they were injured and worked with them and their families. So I understand that, and I know that a lot of the members on this side of the House do too.

I take a little bit of umbrage—I think that's the word—at people implying about our motives. We're speaking up for small business, but we're also speaking up for the workers. I have relatives in my family who work in the construction sector still. I came out of there; I

organized two labour unions over the years before I got into management, but I have many friends there still—at least up until today—and I worked with them on many projects. I think I was seen as a fair administrator and looked after them and always had their best interests—

Mr. John Yakabuski: I heard nothing but good about you.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes. The member from Renfrew—Pembroke says he heard nothing but good about me, so I'll have to make sure he doesn't meet any of the other people from down home.

That's what we were doing, and I take offence to implying that we have other motives. We're just speaking up for our stakeholders.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Somebody's got to speak up for small business.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yeah, somebody's got to speak up for small business, because those small businesses also employ people, not just the directors and executives but people who work for them. Maybe they don't have the wherewithal or the ability to run their own business, so they're glad to go and work for these small business people and make a living.

Going on, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business indicates that, if implemented, this bill—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Great organization.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Oh, they're a great organization. I met with Ms. Andrew as early as this afternoon again.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I was a member for over 20 years.

Mr. Robert Bailey: There we are. Thank you for that piece of information. I was going to come back with a comeback, but I won't. I was going to say something about their screening process.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business indicates that, if implemented, this bill will levy an \$11,000-a-year tax on small business. This from the Premier who said that he would not be raising new taxes. Then the finance minister said the same last week. Were they not paying attention to what the labour minister announced? He must have run this by the cabinet table, I'm sure. Maybe they haven't had a chance to review this. I'm sure that when their members go back to their ridings and these independent business people and small business people have a chance to get their ear or some other part of their anatomy, they'll come back and have a different opinion. The finance minister said this as recently as last week. Were they not paying attention?

The financial impact of this on our small businesses will be huge. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business believes it to be an average of up to \$11,000 per business.

A number of years ago, the shy and reserved member for Durham talked about this very issue in this Legislature and he painted a very shocking picture of what mandatory coverage would do to a small business in his riding. One employer in his riding said that it would cost approximately \$20,000 per year to insure the people who do accounting, purchasing or scheduling for his business.

These aren't people who are on the construction site at all. This just adds another \$20,000 to that job without any kind of benefit to the workers or the company.

This is a tax grab that the government will regret. Mark my words.

Judith Andrew, in a press release, stated, "If the WSIB has dollar signs flashing in their eyes, they may be sadly mistaken."

If passed, this act will put people out of business, it will reduce the amount of money flowing to the WSIB in the form of premiums and it will do nothing to take the unscrupulous people out of the equation. The WSIB should be very concerned about this.

A few more e-mails that I would like to communicate into the record: "Please do not implement mandatory WSIB. The capital is desperately needed, as I am a new small business owner, for my own operating expenses. I have the choice to cover myself or choose not to; that is more than adequate for my business."

I "don't understand how legislating mandatory WSIB coverage for all executive officers is going to help curb the 'underground' economy"—three exclamation points.

"The government is forcing the small construction firm out of business or to the underground economy."

"If this were implemented, it would be extremely costly to my business as well as many others. I think the government should stop interfering with small business. Ultimately this cost will have to be passed on to the end user, which, in turn, will stifle the" very delicate economy.

"It's very doubtful" that the "WSIB or the government will ever be able to contain the underground economy. Those of us who operate legally will always continue to do so."

"One way for the government to make it more difficult for the small business person to make a living" is by implementing this bill. "Please let me know what jack"—and then there's a blank behind it—"is trying to put this through so we can work harder at election time, making sure he or she has to go and find a real job."

Interjection.

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Mr. Robert Bailey: I'm just reading what they said, and I'll leave out some things.

"If this law is passed it will force the honest paying companies to bypass the system as they will be penalized to make up the shortfall in the system which might put them out of business and also cause people to lose jobs and maybe divert to the underground" economy.

"Please fight this on our behalf. Thank you."

"For our firm we all have private disability insurance policies. Perhaps WSIB should consider this as an option."

"I seem to be in the dark about this issue. None of the questions made sense to me so I left many of the answers blank."

"How much can we pay? When an accident happens, the employer is always at fault no matter what. The WSIB should have a three-day waiting period."

Another issue that I'd like to speak about is the unfunded liability. That, for the great unwashed who might not understand it, is the difference between the board's assets and the value of future commitments against those assets. It is the prime indicator of the financial health of the WSIB. It is very likely the case that as of this moment, the unfunded liability is at historically high levels. I know they're heavily invested in the stock market, and we all know what has happened to the market recently.

While the number of injuries has been in decline for over 20 years, in recent years, in very good economic times—with high employment levels, I might add—workers' compensation benefit costs have been on the upswing. If you cannot control workers' compensation benefit costs in good times, how in the world will the minister and the board that he directs control them in bad times?

In 2006, the unfunded liability was just under \$6 billion, which caused the WSIB chair at the time to announce that the board "had turned the financial corner"—but I think they might have hit the brick wall. Yet, even at the time those words were published in the summer of 2007, the board's finances were slipping, and the board ended 2007 with a negative investment return. I know that we on this side of the House keep an eye, as does everyone else, on those investment returns, because I see people with their BlackBerrys and I know they're checking the market all the time.

The unfunded liability jumped 35% from 2006 to 2007 to \$8.1 billion, and that was before the recent market meltdown. Just imagine what this could be. We should be asking for an audit of that, some up-to-date figures. The frightening reality is that the unfunded liability has likely more than doubled in two years. This will be unprecedented.

I'm going to ask directly, will the Minister of Labour or his deputy announce to the House right now what the state of WSIB funding is? Will they let Ontarians know, and the businesspeople and the workers who depend on that system, that the Good Ship WSIB is taking on water and sinking fast, because we need to do something to remedy that.

Increasing workers' compensation coverage at this time by extending these costs to small business is like the Titanic taking on additional passengers when they're already in mid-ocean.

The WSIB had a plan to reduce the unfunded liability at the board by 2014. That's the 100th anniversary of the Workmen's Compensation Board, for those in the listening audience. The board believed that they could do this by holding the line. Unfortunately, last year the unfunded liability increased by over \$2 billion and officially is now at the highest level that it has been since 1997. Unofficially, it is likely at the highest level ever. This unfunded liability jumped a whopping 35% from 2006 to 2007. I would warn every member here that the WSIB unfunded liability will spike again this year, and I would bet that it will probably be closer to \$12 billion by

the end of year, if not higher. I hope I'm wrong, but I have a feeling that's what it's going to be. Given that, I can't see how the unfunded liability will be able to be reduced by 2014 unless the board takes some dramatic action and the government demands that accountability from this unaccountable board.

The unfunded liability at the board has grown dramatically for a few reasons. Last year, the government began indexing benefits beyond statutory levels. This created an immediate cash drain of \$710 million and increased this liability by over \$2 billion. The number of accidents and injuries has been in decline, but other financial indicators such as benefit costs and medical costs have gone up. As we know, health care costs have increased in Ontario, so it just stands to reason that those costs associated with any rate will go up. In other words, even before the meltdown, the board was not performing very well at all. I'm sure that these last few weeks have done, I don't want to say irreparable damage—I don't want to exaggerate—but I'm sure that the damage they've done is going to cause many of these unfunded liabilities to increase.

I have a couple of other comments here:

"This is a principle argument—owners cannot (nor would they want to) collect WSIB benefits—why should we pay the premiums? We can't collect EI either."

"We do not need more government taxes from one of the public bodies with some of the highest-paid civil servants already."

It's simple: "We will cease business."

"Good luck. The current system is punitive, expensive and unfair to legitimate contractors. It is also incredibly" unfair.

"WSIB has been a typical government-run organization, with more inefficiencies than efficiencies. Private insurance is a fraction of the cost."

"If I can deduct all construction cost from my personal income tax, then the cheaters will be out of business because they would have to issue a receipt."

"We are classified as construction-related and yet we are never on a construction site."

"Most builders have private insurance that they are locked into, like my Pencorp policy. It is called a premium return policy. I am locked in to this for 20 years. With WSIB trying to push this through, it will cost me double. My Pencorp policy is in its 11th year. I will lose money by not keeping it until maturity."

So these are issues that we need to look at, and this committee—

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a Liberal tax, to be honest.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Oh, sure.

We'll need to look at this when we have committees. We need to bring these small business owners in, we need to bring people in from the insurance industry, because we need to understand the impact and the social impact that this is going to have on those small business owners. It seems like the height of hypocrisy and irony for the government to have brought this in during Small Business Week.

I would also point out that the key assumptions used by the WSIB in calculating when the unfunded liability can be wiped out was a return on investment of 7%, net of investment expenses. Wouldn't we all like to get that in this market?

Mr. John O'Toole: The pension funds would all be jumping in.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes.

As all members know, the WSIB is one of the largest institutional investors on this continent. I know that last year they weren't even close to 7%, net of expenses, and this year will be much worse, sadly. Actually, last year they were in a negative position with their investment portfolio, and I don't think it is unreasonable, given what the stock market has been doing, to expect a 30% or greater decline in the value of the board's investments.

I think this is an issue that all members will have to look at, whether we're in committee or other areas, the finances. We need to bring the chair back and whoever his financial advisers are, because this is something that needs to be addressed, because this is going to be a drain on all of the economy. It's going to be a drain on business. There are going to be premium increases, because they're still going to have to pay benefits out to the workers who are legitimately injured.

Mr. John O'Toole: It could bankrupt the province.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes, it very well could.

Interjection.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Oh, yes.

The government and the WSIB, if they are serious about wiping out this unfunded liability by 2014, are faced with some pretty tough choices. They will either have to reduce benefits, raise rates charged to businesses or both; they could have to do both of them.

We should be demanding in this House, every one of us—government, opposition—that the WSIB and the Minister of Labour come clean about the state of the finances at the board. They should tell us whether or not they can make this 2014 deadline for wiping out their unfunded liability, and if not, what their plans are moving forward.

I would like to see a commitment from the government that employers' premiums would be frozen for the next four years. This would go some way to helping small business and even larger business plan for the future.

The board needs to admit that the plan to wipe out unfunded liability is not going to work, and they need to develop a more realistic strategy on this unfunded liability.

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The government should also demand an undated financial statement from the board as of October 31, to be released publicly by November 15. Financial statements should be released every quarter after that. That is something that happened in the 1990s during hard times and it should happen again.

There are other issues that I have questions about. The biggest one in my mind is that, according to the Ministry

of Labour briefing that I had on this bill, this issue has been around for many years. It begs the question: What does this new minister, in office less than a month, know that three of his prestigious predecessors didn't know? What has Minister Fonseca learned in his month at the ministry that Ministers Bentley, Peters and Duguid didn't know? They all said no to this same proposal, and that was in good times. Yet, after one month at the ministry, this minister has decided to move forward with this, when the economy is on its knees, virtually. What kind of consultation did we do with small business and the construction unions and everyone else? They all should have been consulted at the same time.

Maybe the only thing that has changed is that the board is now desperate for cash. We could understand that.

This will impose a new tax on small business. Again, I point out that the Premier himself said that he won't raise taxes. We've heard that before, though. Small business owners know better. This move will put businesses under. It does beg the question, though: Where is the Minister of Small Business on all of this? I think we have a minister responsible for small business; I believe it may be Minister Takhar. Have Minister Takhar and his ministry taken a look at this and tried to stop it? Who exactly in this House is a friend of small business in this government? I think we'd be hard-pressed to find one.

We on this side of the House intend to work with small business, with labour, with government and with the ministry to try and implement fair policies. I can tell you that it's not the Minister of Labour who is looking out for small business and business in this province.

The minister said that this bill is supported by the Ontario Construction Secretariat. That, for members who aren't aware, is a group in the Ministry of Labour that is comprised of big labour, big construction employers and a couple of representatives from the province. There is not a single small business owner that is involved in this construction secretariat, yet here they are, writing rules that will put small construction businesses under.

In March 2007, the WSIB chair suggested to the Standing Committee on Government Agencies, which I happen to have the privilege of sitting on, that it was his goal to have employers voluntarily choose the WSIB as their insurance provider. How is that plan going? I will tell you: It's going nowhere. It's on that plan to nowhere, that five-point plan to nowhere.

No one in their right mind would voluntarily sign up for WSIB coverage, and the government knows it; it is clear. They can provide better coverage for themselves 24/7 by buying a premium and an insurance policy, and they'd be covered for 24 hours a day, seven days a week, whether they're working or on vacation. It is clear that you long ago gave up on that plan and know that the only way to get new insurance customers for the WSIB is to drag them in kicking and screaming.

The decent thing for the government to do would have been to at least consult some small business owners. This is what they offered to do during the recent election cam-

paign. Again, we have learned from this government that those commitments made in an election aren't necessarily binding once they've won. I can tell the minister now that small business won't forget this betrayal. I've spoken to a number of small business people. They're one of the backbones of this economy.

In closing, I want to be clear with people who may be watching this debate today that John Tory and the PC Party of Ontario will support our small businesses. We don't believe that imposing a new tax on small business will do anything other than drive them out of business.

Interjections.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I hear my honourable friends cheering me on. I appreciate that.

We support going after cheats in the underground economy, just as the government does, but we believe that the government already has the power to do that and won't use the authority that this Legislature has given them. They've had the privilege of government and they could do this and they won't.

We believe that the WSIB is in serious need of reform so that it better serves injured workers and helps contribute to the economic growth of this province. Unfortunately, what we have today will do the opposite. While they have dressed this up as supporting health and safety and levelling the playing field, it's like putting lipstick on—that joke; but anyway, I won't go there—lipstick on the you-know-what. Do you know that one, Peter? It won't sell. We know on this side of the House that this bill addresses neither one of these issues in any kind of sustainable way.

We believe that we should be making a named insurance system mandatory at the WSIB. That's the way they can address this fraud and genuinely help Ontario workers. A cash grab for the WSIB won't help anyone. Sadly, it won't even help the WSIB.

Mr. Speaker, thank you, and thank you to the members who took the time to listen to me and for their gracious comments that I am sure will follow.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to respond to the member from Sarnia's speech. There was a lot of content, a lot of statistics, well said by the member. However, philosophically and strategically we don't agree with some of his presentation, to say the least.

I'm sure that a lot of the concerns that the member brought forward can be addressed at the committee level. There obviously could be some important amendments or changes at that level. I don't know that the minister has this set in rock, but I'm sure there'll be some flexibility.

As a whole I must say that, having been in heavy industry and construction for over 30 years, I'm well aware of many employees who have not been covered and have gotten themselves in precarious situations as far as being injured on the job and not being covered. It's easy to say that some of these independent companies would have insurance on some of their employees, but some of them don't. I've seen a lot of non-union work

sites where people have been injured over the years, and they find out that they don't have coverage and the WSIB will not be cutting a cheque for them for 85% of their wages. It has happened many, many times in this province. A lot of these guys who are injured—or women—go home to their families and say, "I'm sorry, dear; I don't have any coverage. I don't qualify for WSIB." It's a scary situation.

I think that the construction industry—this is long overdue. Ninety thousand people in this industry will now be covered by WSIB. It will be mandatory, which I think is a big step in the right direction for this industry.

I've only got 10 seconds left. In my presentation I'll be dealing with a lot more of this. But I once again thank the member for his speech.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I want to congratulate the member from Sarnia-Lambton for his speech. I know he took a long time to detail his party's position. Sadly, I don't agree with his line because we believe, on this side of the House, in protecting the people, especially the vulnerable people who work on a daily basis on construction sites. Sometimes they're subject to many dangerous obstacles.

We heard him talking about, "This bill will drive some construction companies out of business." I don't agree with that, because we experience in our office in London—many people come to our office. They go to work, and they go on an assumption that they're covered under WSIB. They get hurt, they come back to us and they tell us, "We went and we worked with this company for a certain time. We thought we were covered. We are not covered. We have no ability to provide food and a mortgage to our family and our house. What will we do?" So they get in trouble.

I think, as a government, as the Ministry of Labour, it's our obligation and duty to protect the vulnerable people among us, especially, as my colleague the member from Willowdale said earlier, the newcomers who come to this land. They don't know the law and rules. They go to work; they don't care where. They want to make some money to provide support for their family. They got caught in this dilemma and they got into trouble. When they got injured, there was nobody else to provide support.

I think strongly that it's an important bill. It's long overdue, and it's our responsibility to protect the workers who go, with goodwill, to work on a construction site. They believe that there is a government and that there are rules and laws to protect them when they get hurt and aren't able to do their job.

So I don't agree with what the member said, although I listened to him speaking for almost an hour. He read carefully all the emails he received—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Frank Klees: I want to commend my colleague from Sarnia-Lambton for his leadoff speech on this

important issue. In response, I want to read an email that I have just received this afternoon.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Not if you're reading it from a BlackBerry.

Mr. Frank Klees: In that case, I would like to simply tell you that I received an email from a client this afternoon that states very clearly that the business community has heard that the Liberal government is proposing this legislation, and has appealed to us to oppose this legislation vigorously. In the words of this business owner from Aurora, he states very clearly that at a time of economic turmoil, the last thing they need as a sector is more taxes, more financial burden, more financial cost and more regulatory burden. In fact, the email goes on to say that if this legislation is in fact enacted, it will drive many business owners in this province out of business.

So the point that the member from Sarnia-Lambton has made very articulately we trust the minister will take to heart, that this is about the survival of businesses. Members here on the Liberal side talk about protecting businesses by introducing this legislation—a strange definition of protection. What it really means is that they care nothing about small business; their head is in the sand. We're going to do what we can as the official opposition to bring to light the damage that this legislation will do to business in the province of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Kormos: You know, there are some members in this chamber who wouldn't say spit even if their mouth was full of it. Bob Bailey is not one of those members. It quite frankly was refreshing and delightful to listen to his one-hour lead. He spoke and addressed this issue with candour and with a down-home sense of pragmatism.

There are opponents to this legislation. We understand that; the government understands that. Those opponents have every right to have their voice heard, and the member for Sarnia-Lambton has done that most effectively today. It was a pleasure to listen to his comments.

But there are some problems here. The minister or the parliamentary assistant had better be prepared to explain some of the problems that jump out from the page at you. I ask the parliamentary assistant to put his BlackBerry down and take a look at section 12.2.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Put the BlackBerry down, not keep playing with it. Lord knows what's on that screen. I'm not sure it's any of our business; I'm not sure we want to know. But the parliamentary assistant is entranced, focused on the image on his BlackBerry. I'm blushing in anticipation as to what it could be.

I say that the minister or the parliamentary assistant had better be prepared to explain the exemption definition, specifically 12.2(5)(a): "independent operators ... who perform no construction work other than exempt home renovation work...." Is that within the last year? The last two years? The last five years? Is that, "I promise never to do it again"?

This bill appears to have been rather speedily and improperly and carelessly drafted.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. The member for Sarnia-Lambton, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to thank the members from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, London-Fanshawe, Newmarket-Aurora and also Welland for their kind and—

Mr. Peter Kormos: Generous.

Mr. Robert Bailey:—erudite remarks. And generous to a fault.

I'd like to conclude by saying that we are going to push on this side of the House for amendments if this bill actually ends up passing. I know that the members from the government and the rest of the opposition as well are going to hear from the small business people in their ridings when they go home. They have to go home eventually; they can't stay here all week. We're going to push for parliamentary hearings.

Interjection.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes.

The minister came in here the other day waving that letter from that businessman from Sarnia-Lambton. It reminded me of 1939, when Neville Chamberlain got off the airplane—"Peace for our time"—and then it turned out that that wasn't the case. I spoke to that same business person last night, and when he found out what was in the bill, he said, "That's not what I agreed to when I sent that letter, at least that's not my understanding." I said, "Well, there will be more explanations, and we'll be doing parliamentary hearings." He is going to offer to come, and many other representatives from small business and the construction sector are going to take part.

I'm sure other businesses are going to be watching this, because they could be thinking they could be next, the thin edge of the wedge: You pick on the low-hanging fruit first and then you go after these other businesses later.

Mr. Speaker, I again thank you for your patience. I thank the members for having the courtesy and taking the time to listen to me. We sometimes disagree in this House, but we don't have to be disagreeable. That was what I have found since I've been here. I thank you again, to all the members who are here, and I'd like to say hello to my mom.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'm going to reiterate a comment I made the other day because of the importance of this bill.

"It's a privilege for me to respond to this statement that finally addresses mandatory workers' compensation and benefit coverage for construction workers not covered now. This legislation would mean more security for about 90,000 workers and their families. On behalf of the NDP caucus, I want to thank the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario for their advocacy on this issue over the last 15 years."

In the last 15 years, the Ontario construction industry has been substantially restructured by the practice of hiring and subcontracting to independent operators. The use of independent operators has resulted in thousands of workers in the construction industry potentially being deprived of coverage and has created a group of employees who are entitled to claim benefits, but for whom no contributions have been made.

In addition, the contractor who insists on subcontracting to firms who are portrayed as independent operators rather than employing workers has an unfair competitive advantage. He has shifted the whole cost of statutory and WSIB benefits funded through payroll to his workers, if indeed these costs are paid at all. When such a contractor bids against a legitimate employer who treats his employees as workers, he has a great competitive advantage.

In other words, the present coverage scheme, which excludes independent operators from compulsory workplace coverage, has created an economic disparity between firms in the same industry. By this I mean that if contractors are considered independent operators under the act, the firm they contract with is not required to pay workplace insurance assessments on their earnings.

It is the position of the NDP that the act should not be a source of economic advantage between otherwise similar firms in the same industry. That is why we support the general thrust of this bill. The issue under discussion requires some background.

Determining who is a worker or an independent operator is a critical responsibility of the WSIB. Workers are automatically entitled to benefits when injured at work, and their employers are responsible to pay WSIB premiums on their workers' behalf to fund the benefit payout. Independent operators, in contrast, are not automatically entitled to benefits unless they have specifically purchased optional insurance coverage.

Over the years, the board has devised and used different methods of determining independent operator status. From 1935 to December 31, 1991, the WSIB relied on an executive order titled Partnerships and Individuals Doing Work in the Building Trades, dated July 24, 1935. The relevant sections of the order are summarized below.

From July 1, 1935, consider that all contractors in the building trades who take contracts for labour only or substantially for labour and perform the work themselves, either alone or in partnership with others, be deemed to be "workmen" of the principal who lets the contract and covered as such under the Workmen's Compensation Act.

The board adopted the order to deal with situations where the party who took the job engaged assistance and agreed to split the proceeds of the job on a percentage basis. Similar situations exist today where residential framing, siding and roofing is performed in teams with crew leaders and crew members.

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These so-called partnerships, which were not compulsorily covered, did construction work formerly performed by workers. This situation was considered contrary to the intent of the act.

Since January 1, 1992, the WSIB has used industry-specific questionnaires to determine who is a worker or an independent operator in industries where contracting and subcontracting are common practices.

The board has adopted the organizational test for determining worker/independent operator status. The Workplace Safety and Insurance Appeals Tribunal has used the organizational test in determining the business relationship between independent operators and principals. The test examines whether the person supplying labour is part of the principal's organizational structure or actually a separate enterprise.

It's the NDP's position that the present questionnaire and overall board practice of determining independent operator status is not working. The major shortcomings of the construction questionnaire I will summarize below.

The subjective self-scoring nature of the questionnaire has made it subject to manipulation. The person completing the questionnaire can tailor their answers to arrive at either a worker or an independent operator, whichever suits his purpose. A person seeking benefits for a work-related injury answers the questions in a way to achieve worker status and, therefore, is entitled to benefits. A person seeking to opt out of the insurance plan answers the questions to achieve an independent operator result. In many cases, persons are instructed by a prospective employer to obtain an independent operator ruling from the WSIB as a condition of their employment. Financial incentives drive the push for independent operator status. For example, employers are relieved from paying WSIB premiums, experience-rating adjustments and other payroll taxes for persons portraying themselves as independent operators. Another factor is that the independent operators are able to make deductions for business expenses as self-employed persons and pay income tax at a lower rate than that of the employee.

The WSIB is experiencing a large revenue loss. The second major WSIB problem that's plaguing the construction industry is that some employers are not reporting or are under-reporting payroll and premiums for persons being portrayed as independent operators but whom the WSIB considers workers. The effect of this behaviour is that the WSIB is not collecting the full amount of employer premiums it should be from the industry since independent operators have the option of declining WSIB optional insurance. Very few independent operators purchase WSIB optional insurance or are required to validate proof of WSIB coverage to the principal. In fact, it is estimated that the WSIB is losing \$350 million of unpaid premiums. This has led to a decline in the payroll base in the construction class and has increased the premium rate.

Accident prevention and workplace health and safety are being compromised. Under the present flawed sys-

tem, the responsibility for workplace safety and prevention is being pushed down to the lowest level, the independent operator. This has the effect of constructors and contractors in many aspects absolving themselves of responsibility for workplace health and safety and experiencing rate adjustments for the person they hire primarily to perform labour.

In addition, some workers are being pressured by contractors to register themselves as employers. Like independent operators, these employers are not covered unless they purchase optional insurance from the WSIB. In short, independent operators leave registered legitimate contractors to foot the bill. Moreover, there is no countervailing reduction in injuries to offset the lost revenue. Premiums are not being paid and the industry still gets stuck with serious compensation claims that can't be ignored or left unreported. In the case of medical aid, the burden is shifted to the health care system without being handled by the WSIB, as it should be.

Executive officers: Many of the problems, financial impacts, and health and safety effects that apply to independent operators also apply to executive officers. To control abuse of this exemption, we are glad to see that coverage in this bill is the same as that for an independent operator. I strongly urge the government not to back down on this very crucial measure. This government is going to take a lot of pressure throughout this process. I urge them not to fold under pressure.

We look forward to hearing from the stakeholders at the committee level, but our initial look at the bill suggests the following concerns:

We're very concerned about exemptions related to private contractors dealing directly with homeowners. It is not exactly clear to me how you exempt contractors who, one day, are doing new home construction and, the next day, are doing renovation work. In my view, installing windows and doors in new construction is no more or less dangerous than installing windows and doors in a large-scale renovation. The point is that while there may be some scope for exempting true mom-and-pop operations, I'm not sure that the home renovation exemption is exactly the right way to deal with this.

Related to this is the potential for home renovators to request that the homeowner directly hire the contractor's employees, which would obviously directly undermine the purpose of this bill.

So the renovations exemption is our most serious concern. We simply don't want it to become the new independent operator exemption.

The opportunity is now before us to ensure that the full health and safety committees, procedures and practices are required and implemented in these dangerous work sites. Workers and contractors will now have both the desire and the legal imperative to ensure safety first. As the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council stated in its brief for the Minister of Labour in 2006, "In the case of medical aid the burden is now shifted to the health care system without being handled by the WSIB"—and I reiterate—"as it should be."

Finally, the somewhat vague date of some time in 2012 strikes us as an unnecessary delay. We in the NDP will be looking for an implementation date by no later than the end of 2010, or at least some very good reasons why implementation should take any longer.

The changes that we will propose will be in the best interests of the industry and the many construction workers who face unprotected risk every day they go to work.

Finally, I'd like to say a few words to the members opposite. While we have our concerns, this appears to be a solid first step on the part of the government to bring

some fairness to WSIB coverage. However, we are more than aware that the same forces that have held up progress in the area for the last 15 years will be doing everything they can to force backtracking on some of the key provisions of this bill. Rest assured, my friends: If there is any backtracking on the very important legislation, you will hear from the NDP.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): It being 6 of the clock, this House is adjourned until 9 of the clock, Thursday, October 30.

The House adjourned at 1759.

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Laurel C. Broten, Vic Dhillon
Cheri DiNovo, Helena Jaczek
Dave Levac, Shafiq Qaadri
Khalil Ramal, Laurie Scott
Peter Shurman
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

Select Committee on Elections / Comité spécial des élections

Chair / Président: Greg Sorbara
Howard Hampton, Greg Sorbara
Norman W. Sterling, David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

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Thursday 30 October 2008

Jeudi 30 octobre 2008



Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 30 October 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 30 octobre 2008

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the non-denominational prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA SÉCURITÉ PROFESSIONNELLE ET L'ASSURANCE CONTRE LES ACCIDENTS DU TRAVAIL

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 29, 2008, on the motion for second reading of Bill 119, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 / *Projet de loi 119, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Good morning; it is a beautiful morning outside.

I'm pleased to be able to get the chance to speak in support of Bill 119, which was introduced a couple days and ago and was debated almost all day yesterday. It's important to talk about a very important issue concerning the people of this province. I have been listening to the debate. I listened to the member from Sarnia-Lambton yesterday speaking against the bill. All he did was recite all the e-mails he got from small contractors in his region and showed their concern about this bill. He never spoke about the workers. He never recited any e-mail from any worker across the province of Ontario.

It's very important to create rules and laws and some kind of standards for people who work on a daily basis to build this province, especially the workers. When we are talking about tough economic times, many people want to find a job, want to work. They are not going to look much at the rules and the regulations; they're concerned first with how they can provide for their families, how they can pay the mortgage, how they can put food on the table.

What happens is that they go to work with a small construction company, and they go on the assumption, as

I mentioned yesterday, that they will be protected, will be covered if something happens to them. Can you imagine that on a daily basis we lose one worker in the province of Ontario? One worker dies on a daily basis in this province. Can you imagine how many people get injured in this province? Despite all the regulations and rules, and inspectors and safety measures we have been taking since we got elected in 2003, people still get injured and people still die in this province. It's human nature that people make mistakes, and sometimes when you make a mistake, it costs your life or you get injured forever. That is why we have to have some kind of mechanism in place to protect those people. We have to have a law for the people who work in this industry, to create some kind of mechanism for the people who work for them, because those people, as I mentioned, go and work on the assumption that they are protected, and then they are injured and discover they are not protected.

I want to give you an incident that happened in my riding, London-Fanshawe. A gentleman came to my office. He was almost 55 years old. He was working in a construction site, and he was told everything was being looked after. What happened is, he got injured, and he came to our office after he had exhausted all other efforts and places. He came after discovering he was not being covered. He was being paid as a contractor. The construction company he worked for used to pay him on a daily basis. They labelled him as a subcontractor taking a job for them; therefore, he would not be able to be covered under the WSIB.

So this person has nowhere to go. He had a house, and he couldn't pay the mortgage. He has a family to provide for. He needed to find some kind of help and support, and he couldn't. What he did in the end—he's being forced to sell his house. Due to this economic situation, he got divorced from his wife, because when you're in a tough time the fights start within the family and sometimes cause the breaking up of the family. There are so many different stories across the province. I think we, as elected officials in this place, have to work in order to protect the workers in Ontario.

My colleague from Willowdale yesterday spoke about something very important. He was talking about the newcomers to this province. For some reason, those newcomers want to work anywhere just to provide for their families and be able to fit and integrate into this province. The easiest step to start with is working on construction sites. They don't care about the rules and regulations. They are concerned first to make some money and provide for their family, and then the problems happen,

and they discover they are left alone with no support and no protection. That's why this bill is very important for many people across the province. It will cover almost 90,000 individuals. I think it's important to step up to the plate and work hard in order to continue to be able to provide to our communities across the province of Ontario.

I heard the member opposite, also from the NDP, from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek speaking about this bill. I think he was supporting this bill, but he has some kind of concern about the technicalities, which is normal. I remember when we were discussing this in the caucus, my colleagues also had concerns about the bill. Not all of us are in agreement about the whole implementation of the bill, but this is part of our democratic process. We introduce a bill and discuss the bill in this place. The bill goes to the committee, and we listen to many different stakeholders from across the province, whether they are construction companies, small construction companies or stakeholders or workers or people advocating on behalf of both sides. And then, in the end, we modify the bill and make it good for the majority of the people of Ontario.

It's a part of the nature of our job. Whatever we do in this place, whatever we talk about, it would be impossible to please the province as a whole, and it would be difficult to please all the parties from both sides. That's why I think we have to make a choice to be on the side of the people who work on a daily basis to provide for their families and also to continue to build this beautiful province.

I was listening to the Minister of Labour speaking yesterday when he introduced the bill and when he had the leadoff on this bill. He outlined the intent and the focus and the aim of this bill. The aim is clear: to create a safety net for the people who work in this industry. Some people think it's not going to be good for the small construction companies. I don't agree with that. In the long run, those construction companies will be protected. If anyone is injured in their company they don't have to pay from their personal assets or money. The worker can go to the WSIB, because the WSIB protects them and gives them the tools, the financial support and the training they need to put them back in the workforce. It's a very important bill. I know we're going to talk more about this bill. I know this bill is going to committee and we are going to listen to many people. I hope that all the members on both sides of the House will support this bill.

0910

Very often we talk about construction—about workers, about construction companies and about the economic situation in Ontario. I think it's important to pay tribute to and thank all the people who work in this industry. This industry is very tough. Can you imagine people working day and night in both cold and hot weather? It's happening every week. I go from Toronto to London and back from London to Toronto, and I choose to drive at night, most of the time, because there is less traffic on the highway. Sometimes I see people working on the high-

way after midnight. They're working 24 hours a day, seven days a week in order to continue to construct the province of Ontario.

Those people work very hard for us. From London to Toronto, you see people working on the highway, 24 hours a day, seven days a week in order to continue that job, despite the cold weather, despite the hot weather, day or night. I think those people go to work with good intentions: They want to work and help build the province of Ontario; they want to work because they believe strongly in their responsibility and duty to provide for their families. And they go to work on the assumption that if something happens to them, they will be protected. This bill will create some kind of balance between workers and construction companies.

Yesterday I heard the member from Sarnia–Lambton speak. He spoke eloquently and represented his party's view, but I don't agree with him. I don't agree with him, but he did a good job presenting his political view and his party's view. He said that his bill will force small companies out of business. I don't believe that. I know that if they don't have protection for their workers, it might cause them more harm, because they will have to provide support for the person if the person gets injured under their watch. Therefore, I think this bill is very good for them if they go, in the first place, to some kind of safety mechanism for the people who work for them and pay their WSIB dues. As you know, the WSIB is a very credible organization in Ontario that provides financial support and training and looks after people if they get sick, if they have that protection.

It's a very important bill, and I hope it will be discussed very well when it goes to committee. We are going to listen to many different people from across the province of Ontario: We are going to listen to the construction people and their views; we're going to listen to the workers; we're going to listen to the unions; we're going to listen to different spectrums, a variety of stakeholders who will give us input that I think will be valuable in order to reshape our bill.

In the tough economic times we are facing in the province of Ontario and across the globe, I think it's a good time to refocus on many different elements that will help us to reshape the province of Ontario. I think this bill is one of those elements, one of the tools that give us the ability to reconstruct our vision and reconstruct our laws and rules.

I was listening to the Minister of Labour yesterday when he spoke about the consultation level. This bill has been under consultation since God knows when—almost 15 years. Many different ministers and many different governments have come to this place and discussed this bill. I think it's about time to pass this bill and implement it. We live in a technological era. We live in a sophisticated society; we don't live in a primitive society and in primitive communities anymore. We should be up to standard. We should be able to protect the people who work in this industry. We should be able to modernize our lives, modernize our industries. I think this bill will

force many different companies to be modern and to provide support and services for the people who work for them.

It's very important also to talk about a balanced approach. As you know, so many different companies in the province of Ontario have to pay WSIB to continue to work in the province of Ontario. Some other companies don't. So when they go bidding on different jobs, the company who does not have all the support and services will be able to make a lower bid and get the contract. I don't think it's fair for many legitimate companies in Ontario that are working around the clock and trying to work under the rules and laws of the province, to be unable to compete because they have extra expenses, and other companies, because they do not provide the services, will be able to get the bid. In the meantime, we are penalizing the big companies that have all the services, laws and rules being applied, because they apply and make sure that the people who work for them are safe, while the others do not. I don't think it's fair.

So we have to create that balanced approach, because I think it's very important to reward the people who are trying their best to protect their employees, to protect their workers. We have to also convince the people who do not have any protection for their workers about the importance of creating some kind of safety mechanism for the people who work for them.

I thought about this bill. I read it many different times—the importance of this bill, the intent and the aim. I think it is a very important approach. It's about time, after the many years that we've been discussing this issue. I remember when the Minister of Labour came to the women's caucus—and the chair of the women's caucus is here with us today. We asked him many different questions: Why this time? Why do you want to do it in the province of Ontario? He said, "We in the province of Ontario are not alone in Canada. Many other provinces came before us and implemented it. They found that it's a lot better, and it also creates some kind of safety mechanism for many workers working for them." Especially when you talk about the number: 90,000 workers will be covered under this bill. It's a huge segment of our society. He also spoke about the implications and importance of this bill and spoke about how we can talk about convincing small companies to come forward and be able to provide services and protection for the people who work for them.

Very often we talk about protection. Very often we talk about health care. Very often we talk about people dying at work and being injured at work. I think it's our responsibility to create those rules and pave the road for the people who work in this industry and make sure that those people are safe and protected.

I have a lot of friends who work in this industry and have small companies. The question has come up and I've been asked many different times, "What if I want to fix my own house?" I think the minister will talk about it: That will be exempt. If you want to help your grandmother, your father, your seniors, your neighbour, or if

you want to do it one time, if you just want to help them and you don't want to use it as a profession on a daily basis, this bill will give you protection. You will be exempt. This bill is talking about many different elements and aspects of the job and the nature of the job. I think it would be a very good approach to exempt certain people who want to do it one time in their lifetime, or if they want to help someone to construct their home.

The member from Thornhill is laughing about this stuff. I think he cares about seniors, because at one time he introduced—

Interjection.

0920

Mr. Khalil Ramal: You want to fix the basement? Well, you can fix the basement without being licensed and protect the people who are going to help you. There are some kinds of exemptions from WSIB, some logical exemptions. I think that's fair in order to help your grandmother, or if you want to help your father, or if you want to help your neighbour who is not able to do the job by themselves. I think you'll be exempt. I think it's a very fair approach. But if you want to do it as a career and you want to hire three or four or five people to wake up in the morning on a daily basis to go from point A to point B to perform certain jobs, I think your obligation and duty as a citizen of this province and this nation is to protect the people who are working for you. Because I think that it's not fair if something happens to them.

What are you going to do? Who's going to provide for their families and look after them if they get injured, especially if they lose a hand or leg or break their back—and we see this happening on a daily basis. We see people getting injured on a daily basis in the province of Ontario, despite the rules and mechanisms we put in place in this province. Despite all the rules and regulations, despite all the tools and the safety equipment we use on a daily basis, people still get injured. So I think it is a part of our human nature, our obligation, our responsibility as a government, as elected officials, to create for the people of this province some kind of safety mechanism which protects the workers.

The small company that employs four or five or six, whatever the number, should be able, without harm, to go and register the workers and get them the protection they need. Because who's going to look after them? Very often, if they have no protection, they have to go to Ontario Works or go on disability. They move people from one spot to another. They dump the responsibility, which they make money from, on the government and the taxpayers. I think it's not fair.

This bill will be a great protection for the taxpayers and will also be good protection for the construction companies who hire those people. It will be good protection for the workers who are working on a daily basis on the assumption that they are protected if something happens to them. It will give them some kind of peace of mind, so if something happens, they will be protected: They will be able to get financial support; they will be able to get retraining, if they want to be trained

again; and they will get some kind of relaxation and go back to work in full capacity for the company they have been hired by.

I think this bill creates a balanced approach, and in the end I wish all members of the House will support it. I'm looking forward to going to committee with this bill, with other members, and listening to many stakeholders from across the province of Ontario and seeing how we can fill the gap and fix it, if we want, and also make it approachable and logical, in order to create a balanced approach between the workers and the construction companies, because we need them all.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Shurman: In response to the presentation from my friend from London-Fanshawe, I have a couple of questions and a couple of comments. The first comment is, while he hopes that everybody in the House will support the bill, I can tell you that this party won't be—not in its present form, in any event.

My questions are these: I wonder if my friend from London-Fanshawe has ever been in small business. Because some of us have; I certainly speak for myself when I say that. I also wonder if my friend from London-Fanshawe listened really carefully yesterday to the presentation from my colleague the member from Sarnia-Lambton. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business, of which I have been a proud member for many years, and which has helped me over the years and helps all of small business—the engine of this economy, if ever there was one in Ontario—has sent a letter to all members of this House. If you haven't gotten yours yet, ladies and gentlemen, you will over the course of the next day. What it says, in really no uncertain terms, is that this legislation is misguided at best because what it does is it hurts small business. There are a lot of people who work in small business who can't afford to see the business they work for get hurt in times where everybody is already hurting on an individual and a collective level.

This bill indeed does tilt the playing field. It helps the big guys, big labour. It hurts the little guys. If you've been in small business—I've mentioned the term “the 5 o'clock sweats” in this House before. If you are in small business, you get them. You wake up at 5 o'clock in the morning and say, “How am I going to survive when they pile yet another tax on top of me?” And make no mistake, what we are talking about here is nothing more than another cash grab from this Liberal government. This government has never imposed a tax increase in its five years, but my goodness, there are an awful lot more taxes to pay. A rose by any other name is still a rose, and this one stinks.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I too have a question for the member from London-Fanshawe. I really do appreciate your concern for workers, and injured workers in particular. The question I have for you: If you support your bill, as it appears you do, why is it that you are not mak-

ing sure that this bill gets enacted and implemented as soon as it is passed? Why is it that the date of implementation is 2012, after the next election? That puzzles me a little bit, because normally when you put up a strong defence for a particular bill, as you've done today, you and your party, it would seem to me that if you really believe in it and you feel strongly about workers and injured workers and that they're entitled to security and benefits and to coverage, you would argue strongly that as soon as it passed it will be enacted. That's the way it should be, and that's the way I believe it should be, so I don't quite understand how Liberals could make an argument, “Yes, this is the right approach”—even, as Liberals say, “This is a balanced approach”—and then argue that it won't be enacted until 2012. Does that make sense for you, member from London-Fanshawe? Because I don't think you spoke to that particular part of the bill.

I'm looking forward to other Liberals speaking to this, because I know you spoke for 20 minutes—God bless—and it appears that a whole lot of Liberals are going to speak for 20 minutes. This is good, and I hope to have my 20 minutes—maybe not today, but soon—because I am eager to discuss this bill and eager to talk about the implementation date of 2012, because I find it inexcusable of any government, but particularly a Liberal government, that pretends to love injured workers and then says, “But you'll have to wait until 2012.” Maybe if you get re-elected—I just don't understand it. You can explain that, please, for me.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Vic Dhillon: It's a pleasure to speak on Bill 119. The opposition side has been raising concerns about the fact that business owners, sole proprietors, have private insurance. There is a day-and-night difference between the WSIB and private insurance. First of all, the bottom line is totally different: Insurance companies measure their bottom line in dollars; the WSIB measures their bottom line in the number of injuries. There is a huge, huge difference, and it's not a good reason for them to say, “We already have 24/7 insurance.”

I don't know if anyone in this House has ever had to make an insurance claim, but I have, and I know it's different. It's difficult, very difficult and you often have to get a lawyer—and there's another difference. With the WSIB you don't need a lawyer; it's a simple process. Yesterday I read an Ipsos Reid research report that was commissioned by the WSIB and I can tell you the level of satisfaction of people who have had to have WSIB claims was very high. In most cases the level of satisfaction was at least 70% and in a lot of cases it was 80% and up.

The other point I want to make is that the opposition has said that this is going to put a lot of small business out of business. I don't buy that. If this insurance premium is their make-or-break point, then I have trouble understanding the business practices of these businesses that will go out of business. It's a great bill, it's about safety, and it's a pleasure to support this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to add some comments to the speech from the member from London—Fanshawe on Bill 119, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997. The member from London—Fanshawe criticizes the member from Sarnia—Lambton for reading e-mails from concerned small business people to do with this bill and their concerns, primarily about having coverage for owners of companies, especially when they, in many cases, have already got their own insurance. I would say to the member: Small business represents some 96% of all the businesses in the province of Ontario. Who do you think the businesses are that are creating the wealth of this province, that this government lives off? It's small business.

The member from Trinity—Spadina raises a very valid point: If they're so concerned about workers' safety, why are they waiting until 2012 to implement this legislation? He provided the answer. The answer is because it happens to be after the next election.

0930

Hon. Brad Duguid: Do you want us to do it right away?

Mr. Norm Miller: To the minister across the way who is heckling me, it's after the next election. This is a payback bill to Liberal friends who supported—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I just caution the honourable member: You can't imply a quid pro quo. Please modify your language.

Mr. Norm Miller: I will try to more fully explain the connections of the Liberal Party and organizations that might support the Liberal Party to this legislation in the 20 minutes coming up that I get to speak. I think that is a very direct connection, and I look forward to having time to further talk about that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member from London—Fanshawe has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I want to thank all the members who spoke. The member from Thornhill wondered if I was in business. Yes, I was a small business operator for many years, and my family are still small business operators in the city of London. I worked on construction sites for many years. I know the implications and the dangers of working there, and the protections that are badly needed to protect me or other people who want to work in this industry.

The member from Trinity—Spadina raised a question about 2012. It's a good question. I said in my speech that some people agree with the direction of the minister and some people don't. This bill is going to committee, and we are going to listen to many different stakeholders. You have a right and the chance to say, "We want to implement it tomorrow," and then the committee will decide whether it's tomorrow or after passage or after two years; that's what they're supposed to do.

I want to thank the member from Brampton West, the parliamentary assistant to the Ministry of Labour, for outlining the intent.

The member from Parry Sound—Muskoka mentioned the member from Sarnia—Lambton. I said in my speech that he only recited e-mails from construction companies, which I respect and honour. I believe too that those small businesses provide good support for our economy; they are, as a matter of fact, the engine of the economy in the province of Ontario. But our aim and our goal is to protect them too; not just to protect the workers but to protect them too. In order to be protected, you have to follow the rules and regulations. The rules and regulations are not just to protect the workers but also to protect the companies. If somebody in a company is injured, they have the ability to protect them through the WSIB. Private insurance, as the member for Brampton West mentioned, is not enough. WSIB cares only about protecting people, without any conditions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller: It's my pleasure to enter the debate today on Bill 119, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997. To the member from London—Fanshawe: I too will be reading some e-mails. I'm amazed at how many businesses and individuals are e-mailing me with grave concerns and making some excellent points about this bill, and I want to get their points on the record. This bill was just introduced a day or so ago and we've had only one day of debate, and there has been very little notification to the people of Ontario that it's even happening. So I'm just amazed at how quickly I'm receiving input to it. I'd like to point out that discussions for these amendments began in October 2004, in much better economic times, with then-Labour Minister Steve Peters.

The McGuinty government wants to persuade the public that this bill will increase worker safety, as well as reduce the number of unsavoury companies out there that have an unfair advantage, thereby levelling the playing field. Let's take a closer look at those claims.

Minister Fonseca says that mandatory coverage will fight the underground economy. That statement seems to suggest that the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board is incompetent and unable to enforce the laws and regulations already in place to deal with lawbreakers. The government and its legion of inspectors have considerable resources, so it's hard to believe that a few simple amendments will rid us of these cheaters.

Minister Fonseca says that mandatory coverage will make workers safer. This claim defies logic. Legislation by itself doesn't protect workers; inspection and compliance to workplace safety rules do that. In fact, if this amendment is really about worker safety, then why did you wait to bring forward the amendments, when you first started looking at this in 2004? Why wait until 2012 to fully enact the legislation? I think the member from Trinity—Spadina just pointed out that happens to be after the next election, so that very well might be why. The minister says the WSIB needs this time to make the necessary technical and administrative changes and to speak with stakeholders about how to implement the

changes. Perhaps he meant that the WSIB would need time to staff up to fully implement the amendments, and those new revenues they'll be raking in will make that possible.

The minister also claims that since everyone in the sector will be paying premiums, the playing field will be more level. But really, the impact on independents and small businesses will be both disproportionate and devastating. It will amount to little more than a tax on the smallest units of business, a tax whose proceeds will flow to the larger players in the sector. The estimate of this burden is about \$11,000 per year for each affected small business.

Yesterday, Minister Fonseca mentioned that he was sure his colleagues had heard stories in their constituency offices "of some independent operators in construction who unfortunately have been injured on the job and did not have insurance coverage and now find themselves without assistance. If they could turn back the clock, many would gladly have paid the WSIB coverage in order to be eligible for compensation and provide support for themselves and their families. Insurance costs money but it provides peace of mind." That's what the minister said yesterday.

Well, Minister, I have had many calls to my constituency office about the WSIB but not one describing the situation that you outlined. Usually, the calls are from business owners, frustrated that the WSIB doesn't properly investigate fraudulent claims—I've had that many times—or from injured workers who are frustrated with WSIB doctors who contradict specialists, or from injured workers who can't get a return phone call from the WSIB, or from injured workers who are ordered to attend retraining programs despite being in pain. Those are the stories that I hear in my constituency office. In fact, a CFIB survey—that's the Canadian Federation of Independent Business—found that Ontario members rated the WSIB the worst agency to deal with. That's quite a claim.

The minister claims that WSIB coverage includes a sophisticated prevention component, return-to-work training and other services provided by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board and that private insurance has no place in Ontario. It sounds like a huge government job creation program to me. Of course, another reason to pursue extra revenue for the WSIB is to cover unfunded liability.

So what does the other side of the argument look like? I want to take a minute to review what business organizations have to say about these amendments. First of all, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business says that the consultation process was poorly publicized, with nothing but a news release, an Internet posting and interested groups like theirs spreading the word.

The problem with that is that the vast majority of businesses don't belong to business associations, so in fact thousands of businesses had no idea about the so-called consultations, and many are only now aware of what the government is proposing. In fact, my own press

releases are making businesses aware of the amendments, and I'm hearing from owners who had absolutely no idea about your proposed changes. With the cost of business being so high, I would have hoped that the government would have made more of an effort to reach out and to listen to those small businesses affected.

By the way, the CFIB isn't buying your claim about eliminating the underground economy. Quite the opposite: They say your amendments will serve to push rule-breakers further underground while punishing legitimate small businesses. Worse yet, they say many small businesses won't be able to withstand the additional costs, causing them to shut their doors and take jobs out of Ontario's failing economy.

In a letter to Minister Fonseca dated October 28, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business describes your legislation as "seriously misguided." They say your amendments won't make "one iota of difference on health and safety." The Canadian Federation of Independent Business vice-president, Judith Andrew, writes: "What is unprecedented about your actions today is the level of betrayal of small and medium-size business.... Your seemingly cocky, uncaring attitude to 25,000 action alerts ... from our members was distressing...."

"Most politicians we know are genuinely interested in doing their best for Ontarians. There may be disagreement on what the best is, but at least their motives are pure. We believe that your motivation, on behalf of your government, has far more to do with political opportunism than it does with the policy at hand."

I think we only need to take a look at the implementation date of 2012 to see the politics of this legislation.

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No doubt the government will argue that the Canadian Federation of Independent Business's comments are sour grapes about the lack of consultation. Well, let me share some of the e-mails and letters I have been receiving, both as the representative of Parry Sound-Muskoka and as small business critic.

A construction business writes:

"Dear Mr. Miller,

"It is my understanding that there is a proposed change to the workplace safety act that would make it mandatory for all owners to be covered with workplace safety insurance. Presently owners are exempt from this coverage unless they opt in to be covered with this insurance.

"We are very much opposed to this change and hope that you will not support the proposal. We do not know any employer who is in favour of this change and we have talked to at least 20."

I will just break from this letter to add my own opinion and ask the government, what is the logic for including owners in this coverage? Because I can't see any logical reason. The owners in many cases have their own insurance or don't want coverage. The only possible reason is that they are looking at getting more money—as I say, a tax grab—to cover unfunded liability.

I will go back to the letter:

"Everyone that I have talked to agrees that workplace safety insurance for employees is a good idea. It is our understanding from conversations with WSIB employees that all workers are automatically covered whether or not their employer pays the premiums. The problem then is not that workers are not covered; it is that many employers do not pay the required premiums. Requiring employers to pay the premium will not then solve the problem of the underground economy; it will only amount to a cash grab for those employers already playing by the existing rules.

"There are many people calling themselves contractors or subcontractors who work for themselves and then hire out to other contractors as subs and who are really employees. These workers are clearly breaking the existing rules, working without WSIB coverage, probably then also not paying employment insurance, Canada pension, GST and the rest. These are the underground workers who undercut the rest of us who play by the rules and who steal from the rest of the tax-paying public by not paying their share.

"We have often reported these illegal workers to the WSIB, but to little or no avail. We have been told by WSIB employees that they are short-staffed and only have time to keep track of the registered employers. It seems then that an easy way to collect more money is to increase premiums for those of us who are already paying too much, instead of making the effort to enforce the existing rules.

"The rules already require that either one works for an employer and the employer pays the premium or the worker register with the WSIB and obtain either an independent worker status or register and get a clearance certificate. The problem from our point of view is that WSIB do not enforce that rule and that fact puts everyone who plays by the rules at an unfair disadvantage. They are at [an] unfair disadvantage because the WSIB premiums alone, without the other taxes, amount to almost 10%. That is 10% less than the unregistered worker can charge less than the registered contractor and still break even.

"We believe that if the WSIB hired more workplace inspectors and tracked down unregistered employers that they could likely double the number of registered companies within one year. You can check it out yourself. Simply pick up the phone book and start calling advertised service providers and ask them if you hire them can they provide a clearance certificate from the WSIB. Do not call just the large companies, because they probably are already registered. Try the smaller companies who employ 15 or less. You will be surprised what you learn. Keep in mind there are dozens of employers in Bracebridge alone that are not even listed in the phone book, and now you know why.

"Please do what you can to encourage our government to enforce the rules and regulations that we already have as compared to taking the easy road to more unfair premiums on employers who are already paying more than their share because only half of the employers are playing by the game.

"In our opinion it is totally fair and reasonable that all employers be given the option of opting in or out of WSIB coverage for themselves. It is totally reasonable and fair that all workers are covered and that their employers be responsible for making sure that this happens. However, in our opinion it is totally unfair and unreasonable to mandate that any employer be required to opt into this coverage with no choice."

Further, from another small business owner:

"The purpose of this letter is to inform you that we vehemently oppose the government's proposed legislation which would make WSIB coverage for owner-operators of small business mandatory.

"Having read Mr. Fonseca's proposed amendments it would appear that he is trying to make two points: Number one, the passing of this legislation will be a step forward in fighting the 'underground economy'; number two, the passing of this legislation will make Ontario a 'safer place to work'.

"I do agree that WSIB coverage should be mandatory for all employees. This would ensure that all construction companies are playing by the same rules.

"We are very happy to provide both a liability insurance certificate and WSIB clearance for work performed when asked for by a general contractor or homeowner. If all contractors employing sub-trades and individual homeowners requested WSIB clearances when having work completed, this would greatly diminish the underground economy the government keeps going on about.

"Mr. Fonseca states that individuals who exclusively perform home renovation work and are retained directly by the homeowner, family member, or occupant of the home will be exempted from this mandatory coverage. Yes. An individual should be exempt as the owner-operator of a small business. However, often this is the guy who may have one or two helpers who does not pay WSIB, EI, or other payroll taxes, and probably does not have any liability insurance. This is the underground economy. I would imagine that often it is the individual homeowner, trying to get the lowest price, who does not think about how a particular company is cutting corners to provide that lower price, who contributes to the underground economy. Until the individual homeowner is willing to pay for a reputable company to perform work, you will always have companies that do not play by the rules.

"Passing of this legislation will not be a step forward in fighting the underground economy. It is a blatant money grab from legitimate businesses. Rather than fighting the underground economy, this legislation will make it more desirable for legitimate businesses to go underground.

"It is my understanding that if an employee is injured on the job, they are eligible to receive WSIB whether or not the company they work for pays WSIB. Therefore, passing of this legislation will not make any difference in how safe a place Ontario is to work."

A Parry Sound-Muskoka-Haliburton franchise holder writes:

"I wish to advise you that the pending proposal to make WSIB coverage mandatory for business owners will most certainly affect my business negatively. We operate three businesses that contribute to the WSIB, employing nine people, with the other two firms supporting three more people. The impact of course will be financial ... not to mention the clerical impact. It is difficult enough to keep the bottom line in the black without the pending changes. Our rate is in the 10% range, which applied to what I take as a salary will be the best part of \$10,000. Removing that much from the bottom line would make me rethink the viability of these businesses. Please do your best to let the government know the dire impact a move such as this would have on many businesses in this area."

From another business owner:

"Unbelievable ... we work so hard to provide jobs for people as well as a living for ourselves and to be hit with this. We have completed a work-well audit, address any health and safety concerns that are brought to us by the staff, are commented on regularly what a safe place this is to work from outsiders and yet now ... we will have to pay additionally to the monopoly of WSIB, something which we cannot elect out of, for coverage of ourselves. We make sure not to take risks that would affect our health and safety and choose not to have ourselves covered with the WSIB. In addition, the secondary accident insurance is far less expensive than WSIB. I cannot stress enough how difficult times are amidst fuel increases and more stress on workplace safety and regulations and lost markets."

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Yet another business owner writes:

"This is unbelievable. We will never make it through an increase in cost like this. This is government so out of touch, the increase in red tape is breaking us. I just returned from a trade show in the United States; you really get the feeling that the people and the government support business owners there. This Ontario government is going to break us. This is not a case of levelling the playing field—it is a case of ruining it—if they keep this up there will be no players left. That should lower accidents—nobody works—nobody gets hurt."

It really is unbelievable that the McGuinty government would move ahead with this legislation when small business is already straining under the weight of red tape and the global economic crisis.

I just received a couple of more e-mails that I wanted to get on the record. One I just received:

"Dear Norm,

"You may not remember me but I have met you from time to time at our Rotary Club in Gravenhurst. I'm writing to respond to the current legislation that has been tabled regarding mandatory legislation for construction-related owner-operators and officers. My brother and I own and operate our company"—I won't name the company—"and we do so from our office. We are in the construction business but rarely set foot on our sites because we have site managers for that. Forcing us to pay a very

high rate to WSIB is like forcing the owner of a factory or any other type of business to pay WSIB when truly they are office workers. We see this legislation as unfair and cost-prohibitive as it appears that the construction industry has been singled out over all other industries in this regard.

"Please do your best to intervene in this unfair legislation."

I would just warn this owner that probably other businesses will be expanded upon, based on this government's track record.

Another e-mail: "I'm sure you are already aware of this legislation but from my point of view, I think it is imperative that owner-operators of pretty much any business have the option to opt in or out of WSIB at their choosing. This gives them the freedom to have private coverage, or no coverage or the standard WSIB coverage at their choice, and I think they should be allowed to make this choice, not have it made for them."

Still another letter: "Still, it is clear that this minister doesn't care about small business, being so much in the pocket of the construction unions and their big business buddies. The bill received first reading on October 28, second reading started October 29, and it appears the Liberals intend to ram it through third and final reading...."

"Members outside of construction should note that their exempt status could change with the stroke of a legislative pen. The briefing package says, 'Independent operators, sole proprietors, partners in a partnership and executive officers of corporations that carry on business in an industry other than construction, under the WSIA, would retain the option of applying to the WSIB for voluntary coverage.' WSIB has long wanted to enlarge its public monopoly to currently-uncovered sectors and individuals, and if they get their way in construction, who knows what's next." A very good point.

I have a lot more I'd like to say, but I'm running out of time. I think the most obvious thing is that this government is just bringing forward what is, in effect, an \$11,000 tax grab on small business, at a time when the economy is struggling and business can least afford it. Small business—96% of the businesses in this province of Ontario, the wealth creators, the businesses that this government lives off and collects their taxes from—are going to be very badly hurt by this legislation. I hope the government listens to the many e-mails we've received so far, and that's just the beginning.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I want to start out by saying that I totally disagree with what has been said. And I also want to totally disagree with what the government's said, and I'll explain that in my speech a little bit later. This is not going to cost the business sector a dime. Why? Because this legislation is not going to be enacted until 2012. I make the point that Mr. Marchese, the member from—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Trinity-Spadina.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: —Trinity-Spadina, makes, which is, if the government is in support of extending workers'

compensation rights to workers, why are you waiting until 2012 to do it? It'll be after the next election. You won't even be the government, possibly, at that point. So don't tell me that Liberals care about workers and that Liberals are going to extend rights to workers to be covered by compensation in areas that are presently not covered. You're saying, "Oh, we're going to do it, but we're going to put it off until after the next election," knowing full well you may not be the government and that this whole thing could be for naught.

Then you've got the false debate on the side of the Conservatives, who say, "Oh, God, this is going to bankrupt the business sector." Hang on a second: 2012. It won't cost anybody a dime. This legislation will not have cost a dime to anybody because it's not enacted. As I make the point, if after 2012 the Liberals aren't elected and—by God, let's hope not—the Conservatives are, we know it's not going to cost anybody a dime. That's why I would argue that the right response is the position that we put forward as a party. We understand and we agree with the intent of the legislation, that workers who are not covered by workers' compensation should be covered. A worker is a worker is a worker. If you're earning a wage, you should be covered by workers' compensation. I have argued that for years, along with my party leader and other members within the New Democratic Party, and from the perspective of business it's only fair. It levels the playing field.

The problem we currently have in the construction trades is that you have people who are utilizing the existing exemptions as a way of basically undercutting other contractors who are law-abiding businesses, who are paying their taxes, who understand they have a responsibility to do so and are saying, at the very least, level the playing field so that we all play by the same rules.

So I say to this government, I say to this minister, if you were really serious about this legislation, you should have put an enactment date after third reading. You didn't do that, so you ain't serious about this whatsoever.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I listened very carefully to the speech made by the member opposite and I've got to tell you, the fact is that there are workers across this province on construction sites who currently aren't receiving the coverage they should get and there are employers getting away with not paying the premiums to support and protect those workers.

Somebody in this Legislature has to stand up for those injured workers, those construction workers who should be receiving these benefits. It's obvious that the member opposite's party never stood up for injured workers when they were in office. In fact, they presided over a pullback of benefits for injured workers, to the point where we've had to play catch-up for the last number of years in increasing benefits for those injured workers. The NDP didn't help either when they were in power, because they brought in the Friedland formula that the Tories made even worse. That's the reality. So maybe we shouldn't be

too surprised when the Tories are not standing up for workers across this province. They never did when they were in government and they never did when they had the chance to do it. But now I find it hard to believe that the member opposite would advocate a policy not to stand up for these workers, not to ensure that these workers have coverage, not to ensure that employers are paying the premiums that they should be paying for these workers.

This party, this government, is also standing up for those employers that are paying the benefits. They are legitimately paying benefits to ensure that their workers are protected. But they are not only paying the benefits for their own workers; they are also subsidizing those employers that are not paying their fair share.

It's time to level the playing field. The NDP member who spoke earlier was absolutely right. This does not take money out of the economy. It makes sure that those who are paying premiums pay their fair share, and those who are not will now have to pay their fair share. It shifts it. It takes no dollars—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Further questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I just heard the comment from the former labour minister that this takes no money out of the economy. Where does \$11,000 for small business come from? That's the economy. Where does it go? Basically, into the tax coffers. That's how it works, and he knows it.

I've heard a couple of comments in response to the speech by my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka that I agree with. First of all, on the part of the member from Timmins–James Bay, I absolutely agree with you on one thing that you said: that it's unlikely there will be a Liberal government in 2012, and thank God for that. And as far as standing up for workers, standing up for workers means you stand up for workers now, not in four years, so I'll give him that.

However, what I want to point out and underline is that this is nothing more than a new tax, and the Liberal Party has perfected the ability to bring in new taxes under any other name. I said that before and I'll say it again. This amounts to approximately \$11,000 per small business in the province of Ontario. As my colleagues on the other side know and as my friend from Parry Sound–Muskoka has said, small business drives the economy here, an economy that even on the part of the Premier of this province and the finance minister of this province right now is sputtering, for whatever reasons. We can debate those on some other level. But at this point you have to ask yourself, what does \$11,000 represent to a small business? It represents oftentimes, and I speak as a former small business owner-operator—I would like to think my former employees would say a good one—\$11,000 is often the difference between making a payroll and not making a payroll.

1000

You can't say this is levelling the playing field; it's not. It's tilting the playing field at an obtuse angle. "Ob-

tuse" is an appropriate word, I must say. You're looking at things like unfunded liabilities on the part of the WSIB. You're looking at things like shifting the burden from yourselves as the government onto the backs of people whose backs are already bending under the strain.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We have time for one more question and comment.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I want to commend the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka for his rendition of the fallacies, shall we say, in this bill, and they are many.

The comments from the former Minister of Labour suggested that this is just going after money that people should be paying and aren't paying, so it isn't going to cost anybody any money. In costing money, it's about people paying more money to government, and this, Mr. Minister, is people paying more money to government.

The suggestion is that it's going after people who should be paying anyway. It would seem to me, and I've been involved with a lot of issues with compensation, that the Workers' Compensation Board actually goes after employers who don't pay on all their employees. That's an obligation. Not only are all workers in Ontario covered under the act, but all employers must pay for those workers, so we don't need a new bill for them to go after situations where people are not paying the appropriate compensation for workers in the construction industry.

The bill is really about making people who are presently exempt from compensation payments now have to pay compensation payments. In fact, that is a new tax on those small businesses. This wasn't about me as an employer paying for the people that I was paying for. This is supposed to be about collecting it from people who haven't been paying it, but that's not who you're going after. You're going after legitimate business owners who were exempt from it before and are not going to be exempt anymore. It's a new tax on small business. I don't know how the government, at this time in our economy, could be doing such a thing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member from Parry Sound–Muskoka has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Norm Miller: It's my pleasure to respond. First of all, to the aboriginal affairs minister: I don't think he was listening to my speech, because if he was, he would have heard me say that we have to apply the existing rules, and that would deal with many of the things that this bill purports to deal with. To the member from Timmins–James Bay: Yes, I think he makes a good point that the 2012 implementation date makes you question the politics behind this move—and I hope he's right that the PC Party is elected when the next election rolls around in October 2011.

I think the group I'm hearing most from to do with this bill are the owner-operators, the owners of businesses that don't want to be covered and aren't currently covered by WSIB legislation. I have a difficult time seeing any logical reason why the owner of a business should be covered. In fact, I see a conflict: an owner-

operator of a small business working, getting into the fall, business doesn't look that great, and all of a sudden their back starts hurting, so they decide that they're injured and should take the winter off until business picks up in the spring. There's absolutely a conflict there. But more than that, those owner-operators, the owners of the businesses, don't want coverage. They're quite happy with the scenario they have right now.

What this is more about is a tax grab, an \$11,000 tax for the average business. The McGuinty government said they weren't going to bring more taxes in; this is an \$11,000 annual tax for the average business in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm absolutely delighted to have an opportunity to speak to this bill. First of all, I just want to say again that I disagree entirely with what the Progressive Conservative—I don't know why they put the word "Progressive" in that—caucus has to say on this, and that is, "It's a tax grab." Let's be clear: There are no taxes being grabbed here because this bill is not going to become law until 2012.

Now, I'm not saying that's a good thing; I'm saying it's a bad thing. But the argument that all of a sudden businesses in Ontario over the next couple of years are going to flee because all of a sudden there are going to be workers' compensation rights applied to workers who are currently exempt is totally off base, because this law is not a law until 2012.

I come back to the point that the member from Trinity–Spadina made, and I think he's perfectly right. I ask the Liberal government this: Do you agree with this legislation, yes or no? If you say, "Yes, I agree with the legislation," then enact the law after third reading. Workers are going to continue to be injured, they're going to continue to not be protected under workers' compensation, and the travesty will continue. So either you support your bill or you don't—and I would argue you don't.

Here's the politics of this—and this is the point: This is all about politics. The Liberals want to be seen in Ontario by the labour movement, and specifically the construction trades, as, "We Liberals, we love you workers and we want to be nice to you. We understand your pain. Oh, yes, we do. We understand that you work hard every day and that you're going to be injured in the workplace, and we want to protect you and we want to give you the rights that, oh, you so deserve."

So they have a law, they bring this law forward: "Here it is. We have a law, we're going to pass it, and it's going to give the workers of this province," say Dalton McGuinty, Mr. Fonseca and others, "the rights to workers' compensation that they deserve," and workers stand in the street and they applaud. Then all of a sudden, they have an accident in the workplace, they go lining up at the Workers' Compensation Board and they say, "Mr. Workers' Compensation, I hurt my back, I broke my leg, I hurt an arm," or maybe somebody was killed and the family is trying to get benefits from those workers. The

Workers' Compensation Board is going to go, "Denied," and the worker is going to say, "Why? What do you mean, 'denied'? I heard Mr. Fonseca. I heard the Premier. He says he loves his workers, he wants to help workers in the residential trades, he wants to help workers in the construction trades—and that I'm going to be covered by compensation. I saw the debate. I saw the Premier stand and say he was going to pass this legislation. In fact, I know there was a vote. I was watching on TV or I went to the Legislature and I saw the Hansard. Yes, there was a vote in favour of the law, not only at second reading but third." Then you'll have to read the fine print, because the bill's going to say, "This is not a law." It is not worth the piece of paper that it's written on. It's not enacted until 2012.

Why is that significant? First of all, workers will continue to be denied their rights under compensation for another four years. Tell me how that's protecting workers. It doesn't do nothing to protect workers. It continues the status quo for four years.

But then the worst part of it is, they say, "Until 2012? Oh, isn't that after the election of 2011? We have fixed election dates. We know there's going to be an election in October 2011." They're basically passing the ball to whoever the next government's going to be, and it might not even be them. I would argue it probably won't be. So they're thinking now, "If we lose government in 2011, we'll be able to stand there and say, 'Protect those workers. We passed the legislation. Oh, bad NDP or Conservative government.'" They'll be able to stand there and be holier than thou, and all the time they would have done absolutely nothing to protect an injured worker.

I say, shame on Dalton McGuinty, shame on the Minister of Labour and shame on the Liberal caucus for trying to dupe workers when it comes to their rights—

Interjections.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I withdraw, Speaker. "Dupe" is unparliamentary, and before I'm told I'm out of order, I want to withdraw the words "duping the workers." I apologize. But I want to say that the workers are not being served by this Liberal government.

Now, let me tell you how it goes from the perspective of the worker. Some of us in this Legislature, on all sides of the House, had to work for a living before we came to this Legislature. I worked in the construction trades; I'm an electrician by trade. The first job I had was working as a labourer on construction sites, so I understand what it is. I've lived it, I've walked it, I've breathed it, and I've seen the injuries and I've seen the death, as many workers in this Legislature probably have as well. I don't have a monopoly on that. Here's the problem—and you see it also as members in your constituency office—the worker goes to work one day for a contractor who's not covered by workers' compensation, who doesn't cover him under workers' compensation. The worker has a slip at work and all of a sudden—I've got a good example. I'll use his name: Monsieur Boulanger, a guy I'm dealing with right now on a compensation claim in my riding.

1010

He hurt his foot as a result of an accident on a construction site where the ground was uneven. He tripped and twisted his ankle, and he has been having problems ever since. His problem was that he worked for a contractor who didn't have compensation because he was part of a subcontractor group. So this worker who had a problem as of 10 years ago with his ankle has been trying to get workers' compensation to cover his medical expenses, cover the brace he needs and the other things that he needs in order to continue working. This gentleman has not lost a day of work as a result of the injury, but has had to work with pain ever since. He came into my office about three years ago and said he had filed a compensation claim and had been denied. Since the original injury, he has been reinjured, and as a result of that, the original injury was compounded. So now you know where I'm going.

That worker now has a second compensation claim for a reinjury of the same pre-existing condition. The Workers' Compensation Board is having a problem determining which injury caused the compensable accident and whether it's compensable at all, so we're having to go to the Workers' Compensation Appeals Tribunal on this one. The Workers' Compensation Board has taken the position, "No, because there was a pre-existing condition, we at the Workers' Compensation Board will not grant rights to the worker for medical aid." He's not even asking for lost time. All he's saying is, "I want my medical aid, as far as braces and other things that I have to take, painkillers and others, and that my day be paid when I need to go see the specialist." That's all he wants. This man wants to continue working. He's a proud, hard-working Ontarian, as we all are, but the Workers' Compensation Board says, "No, no, no. You have a pre-existing condition; therefore, we deny you." So I'm going to waste all kinds of my time, my staff's time, this gentleman's time, the Workers' Compensation Board's time, to go to the Workers' Compensation Appeals Tribunal, WCAT, in order to make the argument that his condition, although it is related to the first part of the injury that was not covered by the Workers' Compensation Board—he still, nonetheless, has been reinjured and should be compensated. That is why you have to insure all workers. I don't care where you were injured the first time or the second time; the fact is you were injured, and we need to recognize that under the act.

Here's what's worse. Is this bill going to give workers any rights to retroactivity on these injuries? If this bill was to say, in the case of my constituent, that it will recognize pre-existing injuries, when he was injured at work with the injury that came from the time he worked for a contractor who was not covered by WCB—it won't even do that. So I'm still going to have this problem. If this bill should pass and we were to change the date to enact it now, I'm still going to have the darned argument that the injury had happened on a work site where compensation wasn't applied the first time.

So I say to the members across the way, this is not a service to workers whatsoever. Clearly, you're saying the

right thing, and I give the government credit for saying the right thing. Clearly, you're doing the right thing: You've drafted a bill. Again, you did the right thing: You introduced it in the House and we're debating it. I presume we're going to vote for it. But clearly this bill will do nothing for workers, because there will be no protection until 2012 for any workers on any of these sites.

The other thing I want to say is, the Liberal government is not treating all workers the same. They say they are and that this is about levelling the playing field, as Brian Mulroney used to say, so that workers, no matter where they work, can be covered by workers' compensation. Well, that's not the case. We're still going to have the problem on a residential construction site. Do you think that residential construction is not a big business in Ontario? There are thousands and tens of thousands of people who work on residential construction sites, and we're still going to allow contractors to basically sub off the work to a one-person shop or a two-person shop where workers' compensation will not be paid and the right to a workers' compensation claim won't be granted. So we're not really doing anything here that's going to help people in a residential trade.

So I say again to the members across the way, the Liberal government, my God, why didn't you just call this what this is? We should retitile this bill, "A bill for the Liberals to say to workers that we really love you, but we're not going to do anything bill." Because that's with this is really all about; let's not kid ourselves.

Let me just say this other thing. Part of the difficulty I have when we get in these debates around workers' compensation is that it's all about incrementalism. I got into politics as a result of my work with diseased miners who worked underground in the gold mines of northern Ontario. People—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Sorry to interrupt the honourable member. You will have the floor again when this order is next called.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): It is 10:15 of the clock. This House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Ted Arnott: Mr. Speaker, I don't have any guests in the chamber at the moment, but certainly this afternoon I will have a number of guests in the chamber who will be here to listen to my private member's ballot item, which I'm looking forward to discussing. I'll be introducing them at that time. So thank you very much.

Hon. John Wilkinson: To follow up on the precedent of my friend for Wellington-Halton Hills, I can say that our page Cole Maranger from the great riding of Perth-Wellington today is being joined by—and they've arrived—his parents, Peter and Beverley Maranger of Stratford, and a Brazilian Rotary exchange student,

Thomas Almeida. We welcome them here today to the Legislature.

ORAL QUESTIONS

VIOLENT CRIME

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is to the Attorney General. It was very surprising to learn that the Attorney General was unfamiliar with the judge's decision to release Nathaniel O'Brien back into the community, where he allegedly went on to kill his two neighbours, both women. So I ask you again today, Attorney General: Have you now read the decision, and what instructions have you given to your crown lawyers in response to that decision?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Actually, my answer to the question was that, for reasons the member knows full well, I can't speak to the facts of that case. My speaking to it would not change that terribly sad tragedy, it wouldn't bring people back, but it might undermine the prosecution, and that would undermine public safety. Let's be clear: We're all saddened by the terrible tragedy. We're angry at those responsible and we are determined to make sure that we do whatever we can to prevent these tragedies from happening in the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Regrettably, you continue to hide behind the excuse of, "The issue is before the courts" etc., but as you know, this whole issue of Mr. O'Brien's bail, which is what I'm asking you about, is not going before the courts again. The only things going before the courts are the actual charges that he's facing.

The judge's decision to release Mr. O'Brien—who, as you know, may well be a serial rapist and a murderer—is extremely disturbing. His alleged victims were all females and apparently all strangers to him.

I would like to ask you again, Attorney General: What message does your failure to appeal this decision send to female victims of sexual assault?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I don't have the luxury of addressing facts when accused persons are before the court; I wish I did. A lot of people would like answers, and I wish I could speak to those issues directly, but that would undermine the prosecution; that would undermine the very public safety we are all trying very hard to protect.

Be clear on our determination: We are going to prosecute to the full extent of the law, as we do. We are working with our chiefs. My colleague and I will be meeting with Chief Blair and Chief Davidson I expect next week. We're going to do whatever it takes to protect the public interest.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Again to the Attorney General: Yesterday, your Minister for Children and Youth

Services acknowledged November as Woman Abuse Prevention Month. She stood in this House and she said, "We will continue to work toward ending women abuse in Ontario." My question to you is, when will you personally demonstrate through action as opposed to empty words to do that? When are you going to stand up for the hundreds of women who every year in this province are sexually assaulted, and appeal the judge's bail decision? Do you know how hard it is for a woman to come forward? When are you going to show victims of violence that you personally are going to do what you can?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Personally, I would stand up for my wife and my children every minute of the day; personally, we all have.

For the protection of women, we brought in the domestic violence action plan. For the protection of women, we've made sure that there are additional police investigative services, that there are additional victim/witness services, that there are quick responses, that there are additional funds for more shelter supports and more shelters so women can get out of a place of danger and make sure that they are safe.

This government has demonstrated its commitment to the assistance of those who are victims of violence and will continue to demonstrate its commitment by building on those supports.

VIOLENT CRIME

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Attorney General as well, and it relates to comments that he's made in the wake of Bailey Zaveda's murder last weekend and the information that her accused killer was on the street due to a plea-bargain deal his crown made and a break on sentencing due to pretrial custody credits awarded by the court.

The accused killer of Ms. Zaveda, Kyle Weese, had his sentence reduced by almost two years as a result of custody credits. Minister, you've said that you oppose such credits. Can you advise us if your crown opposed the pretrial credits given to Mr. Weese, the accused shooter, and if not, why not?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: For the reasons my friend knows, I won't address the details of the case—he knows that. But he addresses a very important point, a point that we've spoken to as a government at federal-provincial-territorial conferences. There is virtually unanimous agreement among the provinces and territories across Canada that when an accused is sentenced, the sentence should be reflective of the facts and should not be automatically reduced by two-for-one or sometimes more-for-one credits.

For decades, the law has suggested that there should be an acknowledgment of pretrial custody, but it has increasingly become embedded in the law that it's virtually automatic. We oppose it wherever the law allows. We take the very tough position. We believe a legislative change is going to be—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: You know, the families, the victims, have to be terribly, terribly upset by this Attorney General and his lack of responses. I asked him a specific question—did they oppose the custody credits given to Mr. Weese, the accused killer?—and he gets up with bafflegab after bafflegab. That's not interfering in any court case, not at all.

We're talking about his crown. Did they oppose those pretrial custody credits being awarded? You have said you oppose the credits, but a check of the record indicates that you support a reduction and not a removal.

If the minister is sincere about his opposition, he must have issued a policy directive to his crowns asking them to oppose credits, especially for violent crimes or crimes involving a weapon. If he did issue such a directive, can he indicate when, and will he table a copy with this House? If he didn't, will he explain why?

1040

Hon. Christopher Bentley: We've spoken often at federal-provincial-territorial conferences and other places about the need to change the law with respect to the virtually automatic reflection of two-for-one and more-for-one credits. We try, on the front lines, to reduce the acknowledgment of those credits in sentencing. We ask for longer sentences to make sure that the sentences reflect the facts of the offence. We are bound by the law in court, and that's why, when we can't change it on the front lines, we ask for a legislative change, not just in Ontario but across the country. Federal, provincial and territorial ministers have asked the federal government unanimously to change it and we look forward to continuing that discussion, while continuing to ask for the tough sentences that are necessary—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I guess that non-response answers the question about the minister's sincerity in terms of wanting to address this situation.

We know the Liberal opposition in both the federal Parliament and the Senate significantly delayed—and, in some respects, weakened—much-needed justice reforms that were before the federal House in the last session. Minister, the official opposition is prepared to join you in co-signing a letter to all members of Parliament and senators asking for a prohibition on pretrial custody credits for individuals found guilty of violent crimes, crimes with a weapon or breaches of bail. Will you today join with us in this constructive, non-partisan effort to improve public safety?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: We're ahead of you. All the provinces and territories have joined together in calling for the end to the two-for-one. Let us be very clear: We stand and will speak for the people of Ontario. We did that pushing for reverse onus bail; we did that pushing for mandatory minimums. We spoke to all federal members, including Liberal members, and told them we wanted them passed. We want further legislative changes, and we'll continue to do so, but that will not change our determination, right here within our juris-

diction, working with the police and other justice partners, making sure that we prosecute to the fullest extent of the law and making sure that we do whatever we can to protect public safety and the public interest.

VIOLENT CRIME

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Attorney General. As we've already heard, the McGuinty government seems to have a lot to say on crime issues; the issue is, they don't seem to "do."

I want to quote the former Attorney General from just two years ago, where he said, "We absolutely fully prosecute gun crimes to the fullest extent and oppose bail on gun crimes. We already do that." Then he said, "There is going to be zero tolerance for gun violence." Two years later, in the wake of the senseless shooting death of Bailey Zaveda by a repeat gun offender, these words from the McGuinty government sound awfully hollow.

My question is this: When will the McGuinty government stop merely talking about its commitment to the safety of Ontarians and actually demonstrate something?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: In fact, that's exactly what we have been doing and what we continue to do. We prosecute to the fullest extent of the law—a law that we do not write. We cannot dictate how the judges apply the law that exists to the cases. So we take the tough position on gun crimes, and when our front-line experience says, "The law's not tough enough," we move to toughen bail laws and toughen mandatory minimums for gun crimes. That's done. We take the tough positions, both at trial and sentencing, on pretrial custody, and when the law is not tough enough, we say, "The law needs to be changed."

We will always act to protect the public interest. We're tough on gun crimes, have been since my predecessor was the Attorney General, and continue to be.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Once again, we hear these fine words, but some of us have actually had the opportunity to review some of the transcripts, and in fact what we often see is plea bargaining on gun offences and gun crimes.

I want to again quote the former Attorney General, from less than a few years ago, who said that confidence in our justice system "plummets when someone accused of a gun crime is back out on the streets the next day."

The gun violence we witness in Ontario under the McGuinty government's watch, where innocent lives are being lost by people who have already been convicted of a gun offence, destroys people's confidence in the justice system.

So my question is this: When will the McGuinty government stop trying to pass the buck, stop trying to blame someone else and live up to your own words?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: We're all angered by the tragedy, saddened for the families and determined to do whatever we can to prevent tragedies in the future; determined to prosecute to the full extent the law allows;

determined to take what is the next step that will prevent tragedies. That's why we're going to be meeting with the chiefs to discuss what the next steps are. That's why we've got 72 more crowns to target gun crimes: six new anti-gun-smuggling crowns; eight new high-risk-offender crowns; 13 additional OPP weapons unit enforcement officers; 12 new victim services staff to support the victims and the witnesses.

We build on what we've done. We're not satisfied with where we've gone, and we're determined to do whatever it takes to make sure that serious crimes are prosecuted to the extent that they must—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: Well, I would say the people of Ontario have heard all this from the McGuinty government before.

Let me quote the Premier from just a couple of years ago: "Should they make the wrong choice—should they choose to become a criminal with a gun—then we will work as hard as we can, together with our police, our prosecutors and our courts, to arrest them, to prosecute them and to jail them for a long time."

Let me tell you, I've looked at some of the transcripts. Your crown attorneys are not only doing plea bargains on the offence, but they're doing deals on the sentencing. That is the reality of what is happening under the McGuinty government.

Once again, the McGuinty government says something to the public—says it over and over again—but does something altogether different. When is the McGuinty government finally going to move on to the "do" rather than just the "promise" and the "say"?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I would say that some of those comments are unfortunate in light of the fact that he actually was an Attorney General and should know.

We take gun crimes very seriously—all serious crime. We have taken the steps, but we're not stopping there. We're working with the chiefs to find out what we do next to prevent these tragedies from happening—an answer that we all want and are determined to get. Where our front-line experience says the law needs to be changed, we're going to push to change it, no matter who's in power anywhere. We won't rest until we are confident that we have dealt with issues which will prevent tragedies from happening in the future.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Acting Premier. About a week and a half ago, the McGuinty Liberals found the money to give to Abitibi-Bowater of Thunder Bay \$1.16 million. At the same time, Abitibi was reducing work hours at its Thunder Bay sawmill and laying off some of those workers. This has now been followed with a shutdown of that operation, and an additional 150 logging workers are now out of work, not to mention that people at both the pulp mill and the paper mill at AbitibiBowater in Thunder Bay are taking downtime.

We saw how the McGuinty government had a lot of money for General Motors as General Motors was laying off thousands of workers. How could you do the same thing in Thunder Bay without getting job guarantees for the workers there? How could you hand out the money and not get job guarantees for the workers?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Natural Resources.

1050

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I would like to thank the member for his question. Obviously, all of us are really disappointed that this in fact has occurred. Having said that, our responsibility is to work with AbitibiBowater, wherever possible, to ensure that there's some viability to their situation, not just in the short term but in the medium and long term as well.

We have been working very closely with them, as you know, and the member will know that we have supported their cogeneration plant in Fort Frances-Rainy River. Hopefully, that will be up and going in the next couple of weeks. We put a significant amount of money into it, along with AbitibiBowater themselves, investing in Ontario. When we gave them the \$1.6 million for the kraft pulp mill, they themselves put in an additional \$10 million. There's no question that there are market conditions that are difficult, but having said that, our responsibility again is to work with—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: What is obvious is that the McGuinty government continues to hand out money without getting any job guarantees. And the story continues elsewhere. Sterling Trucks in St. Thomas is closing its truck plant early, throwing another 2,000 workers out of work, and the McGuinty government has no plan; it sits there. The auto parts sector says that tens of thousands of workers may lose their jobs in the next few months because they can't get short-term loan financing, and the McGuinty government sits there and says it's not going to provide short-term loan financing.

My question again—we are losing jobs by the tens of thousands. When are we going to see a jobs plan? When are we going to see some job guarantees? When is the McGuinty government going to do something useful on this front before we lose tens of thousands more jobs?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: Since that question is not directed to natural resources, may I refer to the Minister of Economic Trade and Development, please.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I just say to the member that he's described a set of facts that are inaccurate. He may not know, but he should know, that obviously all the economic ministers in this government are speaking every day, and several times a day, to the very businesses and the very manufacturing leaders—in the case of manufacturing that you mentioned—and the various industry leaders to see ways in which we can use our existing programs, which I'll happily talk about in the supplementary. I'm talking about billion-dollar, multi-hundred-

million-dollar programs there to assist businesses and workers and ensure that they're being used in a way to help those businesses and help this economy during this troubling time. We are, I assure the member—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I'm not mistaken about the facts at all. It is part of the public record that tens of thousands have been laid off in the forestry sector in northern Ontario, tens of thousands have been laid off in the auto sector in southern Ontario, and the McGuinty government trots out the same old line. Well, everything you've talked about is not going to help the auto parts sector with their short-term financing.

The other part of your line, that your so-called Second Career program is a wonderful solution, is also not working. In fact that program is so ill-conceived that it forces laid-off workers to pound the pavement to get rejection letter after rejection letter from employers who say, "We don't have a job for you," before the McGuinty government will do anything to help them.

When are we going to see a meaningful job strategy from the McGuinty government? Only after we lose tens of thousands more jobs in this province? Is that what it's going to take?

Hon. Michael Bryant: In fact, the McGuinty government has had in place a job strategy to grow our economy, to build on our strengths, and to create new clusters for years—for years. The automobile strategy brought, in fact, thousands of new jobs to Ontario. The Next Generation of Jobs Fund has brought, and will bring, thousands of jobs to the province of Ontario. It is investments in productivity with other companies, leveraging new businesses and growth of businesses to create new jobs; it is \$90 million already spent by the advanced manufacturing fund to, again, leverage and grow businesses that otherwise wouldn't have that money. That's why Buzz Hargrove said that Premier Dalton McGuinty's government has been active and supportive, recognizing the importance to the whole provincial economy—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

VIOLENT CRIME

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Back to the Attorney General again, and dealing with the actions of his crown on a sentencing matter two years ago—not something that's before the courts today—and that's the sentencing of Kyle Weese, the accused killer of Bailey Zaveda.

Mr. Weese was granted an almost-two-year break in terms of pretrial custody credits. If that hadn't been awarded to Mr. Weese, he would still be in prison and in all likelihood Bailey would still be alive.

I asked you a specific question, nothing to do with matters before the court, trying to match the actions of your crown with the words that we've heard from you over the past number of days.

I ask you again: Did your crown oppose the pretrial custody credits awarded to Mr. Weese?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I know the member knows that I can't, and won't, speak to it. I don't have that luxury, because what he wants to ask me about is a matter that we expect may well end up before the courts. So I won't endanger the public safety, which it is our duty and responsibility to uphold.

We have spoken long about the end of the automatic two-for-one remission credit, an automatic credit that is firmly embedded in the law, which is why all of the provincial and territorial ministers have unanimously called upon the federal government to change it; we have for years. The resolutions will continue. We apply the law as it exists. Where it's not tough enough, we seek to change it. That's what we're doing.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I suggest that people have to really question the credibility of this minister. He can't, or won't, explain whether or not his crown opposed custody credits for Mr. Weese two years ago in a sentencing. He won't answer questions about whether he issued a policy directive to his crowns with respect to opposing pretrial custody credits.

These are not matters before the courts, respectfully. If this minister can't answer very basic questions, it suggests he's trying to hide something from the public, he's not fulfilling his responsibilities to victims of crime and to the public at large, who are very concerned about public safety.

Why will you not answer those basic questions? And if you can't, or won't, you should step down.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I say to everybody who wants the answers to prevent these tragedies from happening in the future that I would like to speak to some of the facts that I've been asked about. It would be wonderful to do that, but that would endanger your safety, and I won't do that. That would endanger the prosecution and the investigation, and I won't do that. But be clear on our determination to do whatever it takes to make sure these tragedies do not happen in the future.

We are going to work with the police and our crowns to do what we can. That action has started immediately and will continue, and we will prosecute those responsible to the full extent of the law.

MUNICIPAL FINANCES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Municipalities are only beginning to see the impact of the economic downturn on their budgets. Increasing unemployment and harder times are driving up the costs of provincially mandated programs. For example, higher costs for social assistance in Waterloo region are taking hundreds of thousands of dollars away from other priorities.

Why won't the minister assure municipalities tomorrow, Friday, in his report, that his government will commit absolutely to take back full responsibility for Ontario Works at the very least by the fall of 2011?

Hon. Jim Watson: I know that the honourable member is anxious and is probably having difficulty sleeping at night in anticipation of the provincial fiscal and service delivery review. But, as I indicated yesterday, we have an agreement with our partners—we respect our partners—that tomorrow we will release the document together.

This is a partnership that Premier McGuinty is proud of, that started in 2003 when, in fact, we started turning the page on the downloading of the Harris government and brought in initiatives such as the gas tax, which has brought hundreds of millions of dollars to the municipal sector; uploading the Ontario drug plan; uploading the Ontario disability support program; uploading costs of land ambulance; as well as public health. So it's a track record we're very proud of, and we will build on that when the report is released tomorrow.

1100

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, I've certainly been having trouble sleeping myself, as well as most of the CFOs and the treasurers of municipalities across the province, because of the nightmares we're having in terms of what this economic downturn has been doing to municipal budgets.

Waterloo Regional Councillor Tom Galloway told the Waterloo Record that high social service costs from recent job losses "may result in councillors considering drastic measures, such as cutting programs and freezing hiring."

Provincially mandated social services cost municipalities over \$3 billion. The economic downturn will force these costs even higher, and the minister knows it. These costs simply should not be on the property tax base.

The fall economic statement failed, and we all know it did. It failed municipalities by signalling even less transfer payment dollars. Will tomorrow's announcement make municipalities true partners by providing immediate and significant down—

Hon. Jim Watson: The fact of the matter is, since the McGuinty government had the honour of forming government in 2003, we went from \$1.1 billion in operating dollars, net dollars, to \$2.8 billion in 2011.

The fact of the matter remains that the municipal sector is very pleased with the work that we have done. That will come to fruition when the entire panel, which has been working diligently with the Minister of Finance and I over the last two years, appears at the press conference and releases the document, which we're particularly proud of.

We've said from the very beginning, the report has to be affordable, it has to be a consensus report and it has to move the markers forward. I'm very confident that when the report is released tomorrow, it meets those objectives, and we look forward to partnering and working with the municipal sector, not downloading and not taking cheap shots at them, like the NDP do every time we bring forward a measure.

MUNICIPAL FINANCES

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: My question is also for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. As a former mayor, I understand the importance of a strong relationship between Queen's Park and municipalities. As a mayor, I witnessed the deterioration of that relationship during the Harris-Eves years. The problems were passed down to municipal governments and the dollars stayed at the provincial level. The Tories tried, unsuccessfully, to balance budgets on the backs of municipalities.

The city of Pickering and Durham region, as a result of these downloaded programs, had great difficulty during the Tory years and were forced to pass these costs on directly in the form of increased municipal taxes. Can this minister stand up and tell us how Durham is better off now than it was five years ago?

Hon. Jim Watson: I'm delighted, because we are so well-represented on the government side by the dynamic Durham duo of Joe Dickson and Wayne Arthurs, standing up for the people of Durham after years of neglect by the Conservatives and the New Democrats.

We've uploaded 50% of land ambulance; 75% of public health; 100% of the Ontario drug plan.

Let me quote Roger Anderson, the regional chair: "What they announced this morning is far better than I anticipated," because we delivered, literally, \$53 million in infrastructure funding to support projects and priorities of the people of Durham.

I'm very proud to have people like Wayne Arthurs and Joe Dickson, both with great municipal backgrounds, standing up for their communities and delivering for the people of Durham region.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I want to thank the minister for his response and for acknowledging my colleague from Ajax-Pickering. This funding is, no doubt, helping Durham with its infrastructure needs. It's more help than I ever received from a provincial government when I ended my time as the mayor.

This government is not the only player in this Legislature that talks about funding for municipalities. We hear from my colleagues on the other side of the House all the time. The opposition parties like to talk about improving municipalities, and they like to question this government's motives and priorities. So, Minister, what's the difference between our government and what the opposition parties offer?

Hon. Jim Watson: The difference is really quite stark. When you look at the track record of the two opposition parties and the damage they did to the municipal relationship, it's really quite remarkable. You look at the downloading of public health, transit, roads, Ontario Works, land ambulance, and many other different services.

The fact of the matter is that our government has taken a completely different approach. We respect the municipal partnership that we've developed with the city of Toronto and AMO through the MOU process. The other

fact is that we have worked collaboratively with the municipal sector to come forward with a landmark report that I'm particularly proud of that will be released tomorrow.

The fact is that when you look back on the track record of those two parties, every single time we brought forward an initiative to help the municipal sector, whether it's infrastructure funding or uploading services, they have voted against it. Shame on the NDP and the Conservatives for turning their backs on the municipal—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

FUNDRAISING

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, I'm hoping you can explain to this House why you're hosting a \$350-per-ticket fundraiser with the Minister of Labour for the Liberal Party on November 18 at the Ontario Sheet Metal Workers Training Centre in Toronto.

For those who don't know, in June 2007, this particular union training centre received almost \$270,000 through a program run by the minister's ministry. Also in June 2007, the unions' Oakville training centre received over \$615,000 from the very same ministry program.

Minister, is this now the "in" place to hold Liberal fundraisers: in swanky union halls built with money doled out by the taxpayer through your ministry? Isn't this a disgraceful conflict of interest?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister of—
Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Sorry. It was to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. John Milloy: I apologize, Speaker. I thought you were consulting the table.

I am very happy to answer the honourable member's question. I think members on all sides of the House are involved with fundraising for their parties and they follow the laws that are put forward by Elections Canada and by the Integrity Commissioner. What I am not pleased with, however, is the insinuation that the money that was given to union training centres under a program, the STIP program, was not done in a transparent way.

The program was introduced by my predecessor. There was a request for proposals and there was a fair and transparent process put in place. All approvals under this program were delegated to the deputy minister, who had the final say. It was done under a transparent program. To suggest otherwise is wrong, and I invite him to say it outside the House. That kind of insinuation is beneath him.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.
Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: Minister, I'm not accusing you of anything. I'm just pointing out some facts and asking about your better judgment. This is equivalent to holding a partisan political fundraiser in the cafeteria of Toronto General Hospital. It's the same thing. This training centre is a certified training delivery agent for your ministry,

which means it qualifies for and receives government funding. And while Mr. Bentley, the Attorney General, held your portfolio, his riding association received \$1,000 from this union, and his 2007 campaign got over \$1,100.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would just remind the member of standing order 23(i) regarding imputing motive.

I'm going to go to a new question.

POVERTY

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Thousands of Ontarians are born with developmental disabilities. These Ontarians struggle to live with dignity and to participate as best they can in their communities, but they do so always from a position of poverty because they receive an inadequate disability benefit of less than \$1,000 per month—that's the maximum. If they succeed in the difficult challenge of finding a paying job to supplement their meagre income, the government chooses to claw back half of their earnings.

My question to the minister: How much money is the government making on the backs of these struggling community members born with a developmental disability?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think the question that the member opposite is asking is actually appropriate for the Minister of Community and Social Services, but let me talk about supports for people with disabilities. I think you are talking about adults, not children, but you can correct me in the supplementary if I've misheard the question.

1110

People with disabilities have enormous abilities, and too often we focus on the disability and not often enough on the ability. That's why we've changed the rules so that people with disabilities, people collecting the Ontario disability support program, actually not only keep more of what they earn, but they also get \$100 a month, any month they have earnings, to help them with the costs of work—transportation, clothing etc. We are absolutely committed to allowing and encouraging people with disabilities to actually use their enormous abilities.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently to the minister and she never denied that half of the money that a person on disability earns is clawed back by her government.

The minister said on Monday how impressed she was with the enormous strength and potential of people living in poverty. She said, "All they want is the opportunity to put that potential to work." On that point, she was absolutely right: People in poverty, including people with developmental disabilities, want the opportunity to work and to be fairly recognized and compensated for that work.

So what kind of a policy is it that the minister has adopted that takes away half of what these people earn,

just when they might finally pull themselves out of poverty? Why is this government continuing with the clawback on ODSP earnings of our most vulnerable citizens?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Again, this question is really appropriate for the Minister of Community and Social Services, but I will do my best to answer today.

As I said in the initial question, we are absolutely committed to giving people with disabilities the opportunity to increase their income through employment. We're working with employers to improve the opportunities for people with disabilities. There are some great champions, employers who understand that hiring people with disabilities is a good business decision. It's not just a good thing to do from a moral standpoint, but it's a good business decision. So getting more people with disabilities working and putting their abilities to work is a focus of our government work, and it is something in our poverty reduction strategy that we will be addressing.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Mr. Mike Colle: To the Minister of Education: The worldwide economic meltdown is impacting all Ontarians and impacting all areas of government. As the Minister of Finance maintained last week, just like families and businesses across Ontario, we are looking for ways to curb our expenses and defer non-urgent costs.

My constituents in Eglinton–Lawrence know that publicly funded education remains a key priority for our government. However, some of my constituents are concerned that deferring maintenance for schools may negatively impact on our students and their future success. Minister, is it not better to defer investments in other areas rather than in maintenance?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I certainly agree with the member for Eglinton–Lawrence that governments across the world are taking a hard look at their expenditures, and our government's no different.

For the Ministry of Education, what that's meant is that we have had to revise our plans, and we've done that in a way to minimize the impact on students and classroom learning. So we've reduced the school renewal grant line for the 2008-09 school year, but boards will retain 80% of that grant line. What that means is that they'll be able to continue to fund urgent school capital projects, but we're asking them to make those a priority ahead of some of the minor and less urgent projects. So it means that a non-urgent window repair might have to wait, but a new roof or boiler would be able to go ahead.

It's true that some people have claimed that we should have done something else, that we should have increased primary class size, for example. We disagree. That suggestion would have meant widespread disruption across the province in all our elementary—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Mike Colle: Certainly, I agree: We shouldn't be increasing class sizes to where there were 35 students in

my schools. As you know, Minister, I have some of the finest schools in Canada: John Wanless, Allenby, Blessed Sacrament.

What I really want to know from you is, is there a list of various investments that we are making, despite the paring back of these maintenance projects? Are there ongoing investments we are making in our schools to ensure that our children are in the best facilities possible? Could you give us a list of some of these investments we're making, certainly in the Toronto schools, but also schools all across Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: When we came into office in 2003, one of the things we did very quickly was begin to invest in capital renewal, because there had been neglect for years. There was a huge backlog, and we knew that our school buildings needed to be upgraded. In fact, one of the reasons that we're able to defer some of the non-urgent repairs at this point is because there has been such a substantial investment. We increased student renewal by 31% since we came into office, and our Good Places to Learn grant, a \$4-billion strategy, has funded almost 11,000 school repairs, renovations and new construction projects.

We've also allocated funding to replace 147 schools that are in the poorest shape. For example, the Toronto District School Board has had \$371 million in Good Places to Learn investment funding—1,635 construction projects. The Toronto Catholic board has had \$74.5 million in—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Minister of Finance: Minister, your economic statement of last week contained no new initiatives to stimulate job creation or to help Ontario families and seniors struggling to make ends meet in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario. In response to similar economic challenges, BC's Premier Campbell brought forward a 10-point plan to stimulate their economy and to assist families. Saskatchewan did much of the same and we expect a similar plan in Quebec on Tuesday.

All we got from Dalton McGuinty was the same old high-tax, high-spending, no-jobs policy that is causing Ontario to fall further and further behind and back into deficit. Minister, we've now seen your made-in-Ontario deficit; where is your made-in-Ontario jobs plan?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: On March 23 of this year, I laid out a budget that had a five-point plan. In that plan, we budgeted \$3.9 billion in infrastructure. In addition, we provided an additional \$1.1 billion, creating 100,000 jobs, and that member and his party voted against it. We committed \$1.5 billion for retraining to help workers who have lost their jobs fill some of the 100,000 jobs in Ontario that are unfilled due to the fact that the skill sets didn't match, and that member and his party voted against it. We have hired nurses and teachers. We have

invested in health care and education in record ways, because those jobs are important. That member and his party voted against it.

This government has laid out a plan. The plan is working in the context of a global—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: The only thing that seems to be working with your so-called plan is that some 200,000-plus well-paying manufacturing jobs have now fled our province. Ontario is now last or next to last in economic growth and job creation.

Minister, another major omission in your economic statement are the medium-term economic outlooks that typically show if we expect surpluses or deficits for future years. That page is simply missing altogether from your 2008 economic statement. When I open my 2007 statement, it's right there on page 81; 2004, 2005 and 2006 all contain this vital table. Clearly, this is your attempt to hide your projected massive deficit for the next fiscal year.

The TD report is predicting that Dalton McGuinty will run a \$4-billion to \$5-billion deficit next year. Minister, is TD correct?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member opposite would certainly know a lot about hiding deficits. When we came to office, his party had left a deficit of \$5.5 billion, having presented a balanced budget.

As I said in the fall statement, we are faced with dramatic times. We are responding with the best information available to us. Somebody yesterday said, "Long-term damage ... can result from misguided attempts to balance the books during an historic global downturn." Jim Flaherty said that. You are out of touch with your own federal cousins, and I would recommend—you had supported him against Mr. Tory in the leadership, I know. I would suggest that you have a long chat with Mr. Flaherty about the challenges that governments are having. I've been doing that. I'll be meeting with him—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

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SEWAGE SLUDGE

M^{me} France Gélinas: My question is for the Deputy Premier: Why is this government continuing to allow the use of sewage sludge on Ontario farmlands, despite the fact that it has no information on the health effects of such a practice?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: This is a very important issue, indeed. What is under way right now, actually, is that our government, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and the Ministry of the Environment have worked very closely to review the practice of spreading biosolids on farmland. This is a practice that has been in place in the province of Ontario for 30 years. We are committed to a science-based approach to dealing

with this. As a result of our work, we have posted on the Environmental Bill of Rights registry draft regulations that will regulate the spreading of this product in the province of Ontario. We are absolutely committed to ensuring the health, safety and well-being of people in our communities. That is why we are now, in our process, out consulting the public on the draft regulations that are—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary.

M^{me} France Gélinas: How can this government say that it's protecting the health of the people of Ontario when we don't know the health effects of sewage sludge on the health of Ontarians? Each and every day across Ontario, sewage sludge is spread on our farmland, yet there is no systematic monitoring of the impact on our health. It's not in the mandate of the health unit or anybody to look at the health effects.

The minister shouldn't just take my word for it. Farmers, doctors, environmentalists, health care activists—they're all raising the alarm bells. Here's what Grant Robertson from the National Farmers Union, Ontario division, has to say: "We know that there are many toxic residues present in sewage sludge and until we can remove these toxic residues, the National Farmers Union believes the spreading of sewage sludge should be prohibited."

My question is, would the minister commit today to a moratorium on the use of sewage sludge on farmland, or—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I think that we are taking a very balanced approach; we are taking a science-based approach. We have been consulting with our partners right across Ontario.

But I think that it's important to correct some of what has been presented by the honourable member. OMAFRA has participated, conducted and funded a number of environmental studies with respect to this issue, as well as the Ministry of the Environment, and it will be with that body of evidence that we have put forward draft regulations. We are inviting the public to review those draft regulations and offer us their comments on those as well. I would also like to identify that local health units in Ontario have investigated complaints about adverse health effects from land application, and they have—

Interruption.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just remind the guests in the gallery that you're welcome to watch the proceedings, but not participate in the proceedings.

Minister.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: This is a very serious issue, and that is why we have taken, in my view, a very responsible, comprehensive and inclusive way to deal with this. We look forward to the input that we will receive as a result of the past posting—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

CHILD PROTECTION

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: My question is for Minister of Children and Youth Services. October is Child Abuse Prevention Month, and during this month of October, attention is brought to bear that by working collectively each and every day, we can prevent child abuse.

Preventing child abuse is the goal of my private member's bill to make reporting of child pornography mandatory. From the work that I've done in this area, I know from those involved in child protection that it has a huge emotional impact. It's rewarding when a tragedy is prevented, but just as often, it's incredibly heartbreaking.

Can the minister please tell this Legislature what she's doing to recognize the crucial contributions made by those involved in child protection, and what actions she's taking to support their work?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: First, let me thank the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore for her tireless work in protecting children from abuse, including raising awareness of child abuse in the form of online child pornography.

October is Child Abuse Prevention Month and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the workers who work in this field. It's a very demanding field and they do an extraordinarily fine job.

Yesterday, I joined the four children's aid societies in Toronto here in the Legislature to recognize Child Abuse Prevention Month and to honour the extraordinary contributions made by Dr. Jim Wilkes, winner of this year's Stand Up for Kids Award. Dr. Wilkes is a child psychologist. His work includes advocacy for children's rights, counselling and mentorship. His work has helped thousands of children across this province overcome the trauma of abuse and neglect.

Child protection is currently undergoing—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I too would like to echo the minister's thanks to our child protection workers. There's an organization in my community called The Gatehouse, with which I've worked for more than 10 years. They continue to work with youth who are survivors of child abuse to heal and to better their lives.

Because those individuals haven't had the same opportunity as other kids early in life, research shows that youth formerly in the care of children's aid societies are up to three times more likely to be unemployed and up to three times more likely to drop out of high school, and that's simply unacceptable.

What is our government doing to better support these kids and give them a better chance at a successful future?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Giving crown wards the opportunity to be the very best they can be is a goal not only for my ministry, but of the whole government. We have been working together to improve opportunities for kids in care. I'd like to talk about a couple of those.

This past spring, we announced the extension of the Ontario child benefit, the equivalent amount to kids in care. This funding will help them participate in learning and recreational programs to support their healthy development. The Ministries of Training, Colleges and Universities, Education, and Children and Youth Services have been working together to develop crown ward education championship teams that bring together government, CASs, school boards, colleges and universities, and community members to help crown wards complete high school and pursue post-secondary education.

And our government has announced Ontario access grants for crown wards and crown ward post-secondary fee application reimbursement—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question?

DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a question for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. The provinces of Prince Edward Island, Manitoba, Alberta, BC and Saskatchewan have all partnered with the federal government to provide direct disaster relief funding to farmers through the AgriRecovery program. Why isn't the same program available to farmers in Ontario?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: We are committed to implementing a disaster relief program for farmers in Ontario. We do want to ensure, though, that when we sign a deal it's good for our farmers and the people of Ontario. We want to be sure that the people of Ontario are not going to pay proportionately more than might be paid in other provinces. This is a very important deal for us. The honourable member would know, from other programs we've signed with the federal government, when we sign them, we have them for a number of years. So we do want to make sure that going forward we have the very best, most effective, most fair and equitable program that we can.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Norm Miller: Minister, as I pointed out in the first part of my question, there are at least five provinces that have signed. In the Parry Sound-Muskoka area, small producers are struggling. This summer saw record rainfall in the Magnetawan region. As a result, many smaller cattle and livestock operations through east Parry Sound district don't have enough feed for their livestock. One farmer is looking at spending some \$24,000 for feed, and that's money he just doesn't have. The federal government has partnered with other provinces and has been providing assistance through the disaster relief program, AgriRecovery, that is part of the new suite of business risk management programs, yet farmers in my region can't get a straight answer about this program from OMAFRA staff. I have inquired with your office and have not had an answer as well.

Why aren't you providing this help to small farmers that could be provided through the AgriRecovery program?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I think it's important to clarify the difference between a disaster and some of the challenges that are faced by producers in agriculture on a yearly basis. They are subject to two climates: the economic climate and the natural climate. To address some of the challenges they may experience with the natural climate year over year, we have production insurance. Production insurance does provide that safety net for producers should they have an impact on the crops they have and what the yields are from one year to the next. This is, again, a federal-provincial cost-shared program.

I would suggest—and I certainly do try to be religious about returning calls from my colleagues on all sides of the House. I will look to ensure that the honourable member gets a reply, gets this—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question.

LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. Earlier this week, I asked you the question in regard to the use of ONR staff and equipment crossing the picket line at the Xstrata metallurgical site in Timmins.

You answered, "I can assure you that the determination was made very clearly to me that that was indeed a one-time occurrence ... and it will not be happening again."

Can you tell me why you're allowing crown equipment, Ontario Northland trains, specifically locomotives, to be utilized on the Xstrata property by Xstrata staff?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Of course, the member knows full well, and it's important to say this, that indeed the ONTC is an arm's-length agency of the government of Ontario and, as such, it makes its own day-to-day business decisions. I'm in no position to direct the ONTC, and the member knows that well.

Having said that, they did acknowledge that indeed they did on one occasion basically provide services to the Kidd Creek operation while the strike was going on. Those concerns were expressed to them, that were brought up as a result of your question, I say to the member, and indeed they indicated that that would be a one-time occurrence. Again, I am certainly in no position, and I know the member understands that, to direct the ONTC, but certainly it has been made clear that indeed that was a one-time occurrence.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would like to file a notice of dissatisfaction on that answer.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I trust the member will file the proper paperwork with the table.

The time for question period has ended. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1132 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Reza Moridi: It's my pleasure to welcome Ms. Camelia Ionescu and Sir Karim Hakimi to the House.

Mr. Dave Levac: In the east gallery, with us today to support a private member's bill that will be introduced a little later on, is Frances Wdowczyk, executive director of the Student Life Education Company, and Mr. Stephen Wdowczyk, director of National Students Against Impaired and Distracted Driving Day. They are here representing Billi Jo Cox, director of BACCHUS Canada, and Shelley Timms, president of the Ontario Community Council on Impaired Driving. We welcome them here this afternoon for the introduction of the bill.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'll take this opportunity, on behalf of the member from Welland and on behalf of page Faye Campbell, to welcome her mother, Kim Meade, and her aunt Minerva Prudy today in the galleries. Welcome to Queen's Park.

I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome in the west members' gallery Shernette Wolffe, Clerk of the House of Bermuda, and her husband, Gary, to Queen's Park today. Welcome.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Last week, people across Ontario watched the Minister of Finance read the economic statement, hoping that the McGuinty government would admit that they have a problem and their plan isn't working.

Farmers were watching, hoping that this government would finally take action to help them by reducing unnecessary red tape and by supporting our struggling young, new farmers. Over and over in this chamber I've told the Premier and the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs that they gave the money to the wrong people and that their program missed the new and young farmers, who need support the most.

Right now, those struggling farmers are still contributing to the economy. They are employing people, buying feed and producing great Ontario-grown food. But if the government doesn't take action and lets those farmers lose the farm, not only will they join the many unemployed people in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, but the economy will suffer.

This morning I received an e-mail from one of those farmers. He is losing his farm on December 31. Across Ontario, people are losing their jobs, factories are closing and farmers are losing their farms.

Instead of announcing changes to help farmers and businesses, the McGuinty government used the economic statement to tell us that they are staying the course. They don't seem to realize that you should only stick to your plan if the plan is working, and the McGuinty government plan is clearly not working.

This is not the time for budget reannouncements. It's a time for real action to help Ontarians get back to work and make this province the strongest in the country once again.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I'm rising in the House to remind all members that this afternoon we will be debating my private member's bill, Bill 106, An Act to provide for safer communities and neighbourhoods.

This bill is a result of a shared vision, a vision we all share in this House: to create safe, healthy and strong communities in our respective cities and neighbourhoods.

The purpose of the act is simple: to ensure that we rehabilitate properties that are used for illegal activities, to make sure that those properties are used for their intended use, for people to live in or conduct business.

I am very proud to say that this bill has received widespread support across the province from the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, the city of Ottawa, the city of Hamilton, the county of Peterborough, the city of Kawartha Lakes and the city of Kingston; in addition, the Federation of Urban Neighbourhoods of Ontario, the Ontario Real Estate Association, Crime Prevention Ottawa, Ottawa Neighbourhood Watch executive committee, Concerned Citizens for Safer Neighbourhoods, Friends and Tenants of Ottawa Community Housing and many others.

I urge all members to please participate in the debate later this afternoon. I sincerely hope that you will support Bill 106 because it is our collective responsibility to ensure that we continue to live in safer, stronger and healthier neighbourhoods and communities.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I rise today to address a very turbulent issue. These days, the Canadian dollar and the TSX are a lot like the weather: It's hot, then it's cold, and then, just as soon as the sun comes out, you get dumped on.

Certainly, this unpredictable climate has many Ontarians worried. They worry about their jobs, they worry about their investments, they worry about their retirement funds, and they worry about the future of their children. But Ontarians are bright and resourceful. They are hunkering down and taking the necessary steps to avoid catastrophe. They are tightening spending, sacrificing luxuries and planning ahead.

This Liberal government, on the other hand, is not so ready for the harsh winter. The storm clouds are swirling overhead, but they don't seem to notice. They stick to their five-point plan despite its failed record; they continue to spend on often inefficient programs and positions, now to the point of deficit; they make decisions based on publicity and short-term political gain instead of offering a long-term vision; and they treat themselves to lavish parties—read Windsor casino—with taxpayers'

money, while hospital projects—read Oakville hospital and Milton hospital—stall.

What kind of example is this? When the winds of change are blowing and people look to the government for leadership and security, looking at the McGuinty government, all they see is an economic plan that is frozen in fear and iced up by years of ineptitude.

CHLOE BROWN

Mr. Charles Sousa: It is with great pleasure that I rise today to speak about the accomplishments of a young lady from the riding of Mississauga South. Chloe Brown competed at the Unión Americana de Natación in the Synchronized Swimming Championship in Calgary this August, and brought home the gold. Teams from Canada, the US, South America and the Caribbean competed in a variety of swimming events. The participants at the Calgary competition were 12 to 18 years of age. Chloe was one of the 10 girls on Canada's team, which was led by head coach Chantal Vallières and assistant coaches Vanessa Bray and Laurel Alexander.

The girls came from all over Canada to compete and managed to defeat the US and Mexico to take the gold. This was an especially important victory for our girls: It was the first time the event was held in Canada, and they worked hard for it. Chloe and her team trained relentlessly leading up to the games in August. They even did two weeks of additional training in Quebec before heading to Calgary.

After her win, Chloe came back home to Mississauga for some well-deserved rest, although it didn't take her long to get back into the pool. For all her hard work and in recognition of her incredible achievements, Chloe was also awarded the Synchro Swim Ontario Athlete of the Year Award. Congratulations, Chloe.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Frank Klees: Over the past number of months, I have brought a number of road safety issues to the attention of the Minister of Transportation, along with recommendations for legislative and regulatory amendments. As we near the end of the legislative session, I appeal to the minister to include the following proposals in the omnibus bill that we anticipate the minister will table shortly:

(1) To mandate zero tolerance for blood alcohol content of any amount in drivers below the age of 21, as advocated by the Mulcahy family and supported by thousands of Ontarians through petitions to this House;

(2) To implement a system of instant vehicle insurance status verification in the province to effectively address, once and for all, the serious issue of uninsured drivers, insurance fraud and the implications to innocent victims;

(3) To allow motorcycles access to high-occupancy vehicle lanes. In this respect, this will ensure safety of motorcycle riders;

(4) To make it illegal for children under the age of 12 to ride as passengers on motorcycles, thereby reducing the risk of serious injury or death; and

(5) To amend legislation to require that pedestrians and crossing guards have fully cleared the entire roadway before vehicles are allowed to proceed. This is a change that will save lives and prevent injury to children, as well as to crossing guards and pedestrians.

I look forward to working with the Minister of Transportation, and we anticipate that in the interest of public safety and road safety, these measures will be included in the next legislation he tables.

SEWAGE SLUDGE

M^{me} France Gélinais: Across the province, sewage sludge is being used as a fertilizer on Ontario farms. Sludge is the solid waste left over at the end of the sewage treatment process after water is removed from human, commercial, hospital and industrial waste. But there are simply too many unanswered questions about the human health effects of sludge to allow this practice to continue.

We don't know the health impact, so why take the risk and use sewer sludge on our food crops?

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That's why this morning I was joined by environmentalists, farmers and activists who all say it's time to place an immediate moratorium on using sewage sludge as fertilizer on farm fields: Maureen Reilly from Sludge-Watch, an environmental group; Grant Robertson, the Ontario coordinator of the National Farmers Union; and Wendy Deavitt, a Warkworth resident who has experienced first-hand the negative impact of using sewage sludge as a farm fertilizer. They are here in the gallery with us today.

They all agree that for the sake of being cautious about our health and taking the lessons of past public health crises seriously, we must re-evaluate the use of sewage sludge. Ontarians should have confidence that everything they eat is safe. It is hard to see why the McGuinty Liberals would allow this practice to continue.

KARIM HAKIMI

Mr. Reza Moridi: I rise here today to recognize the extraordinary achievements of Sir Karim Hakimi, founder of Hakim Optical. In recognition of his contribution to the community, the city of Toronto has recently changed the name of a section of Lebovic Avenue in Scarborough to Hakimi Avenue.

Mr. Hakimi is an entrepreneur and philanthropist of Iranian heritage. While a young man, he moved to Europe and later immigrated to Canada. In Toronto, Mr. Hakimi was able to open his first optical lab in 1967 on Elm Street, ultimately building a chain of 140 showrooms, 100 small laboratories and six major factories across Canada.

Mr. Hakimi is a supporter of countless charitable activities. For example, he has donated hundreds of thousands of pairs of eyeglasses, in co-operation with the Rotary Club and Lions International, to those in need around the world. He has also led the Ride for Sight motorcycle charity parade.

In recognition of his generous and humanitarian efforts, Mr. Hakimi was inducted as a knight of the Sovereign Order of St. John of Jerusalem, Knights of Malta, in June 2005 at Queen's Park.

Sir Karim Hakimi is a shining example of the opportunity for success that awaits new Canadians and a role model for people of all cultural backgrounds.

MUNRO HONEY AND MEADERY

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: On October 18 I joined local dignitaries and residents of Brooke-Alvinston, as well as former employees from afar, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Bryans family business, Munro Honey and Meadery.

In 1958, Howard and Mavis Bryans purchased the company, which was then known as Munro Apiaries. In order to take advantage of its established reputation, it was decided that they would continue to produce honey under the Munro name. Thirty years later their sons, John and Davis, and their wives, Christine and Mary, took over the business, and now Davis's son and daughter-in-law are the third generation of Bryans to be involved in the business.

In 1999, Munro Honey and Meadery became the first and only meadery in the province of Ontario. I joined Minister Leona Dombrowsky in 2007 as we proudly presented Munro Honey with the Premier's Award for Agri-Food Innovation and Excellence. The Bryans added to their trophy case when they were awarded gold, silver and bronze medals at the 2008 International Mead Festival in Boulder, Colorado, for their traditional-style meads.

Munro Honey and Meadery is a terrific example of a successful Ontario family business founded and flourishing in rural Ontario. I invite everyone to travel to Brooke-Alvinston to attend Munro's Christmas open house on November 22 and take the opportunity to try the award-winning traditional meads and innovative fruit-blended meads.

KAWARTHA ETHANOL

Mr. Jeff Leal: Kawartha Ethanol Inc. is a locally owned company that is in the final stages of constructing a corn-to-ethanol production facility which will initially produce 80 million litres of fuel-grade ethanol. Corn will be purchased directly from farmers and fuel will be marketed through the largest independent petroleum company in Canada. Kawartha Ethanol will be a leader in innovation in Canada's ethanol industry. When completed, the plant will use its thin stillage and an anaerobic digester to produce internal electricity to service the

plant's needs. Surplus electricity will be fed into the grid. By-products from our Quaker Oats factory have been secured to mix with distiller grain to make a unique product more palatable and economical for the dairy industry.

On Friday, October 17, our government committed \$4.9 million in funding to Kawartha Ethanol Inc. I want to congratulate all those who are involved in this unique project. The positive effects it will have on this community and the province as a whole are tremendous and it will be felt for many generations.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Mr. Charles Sousa: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

Bill 100, An Act to amend the Corporations Tax Act and the Taxation Act, 2007 / *Projet de loi 100, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'imposition des sociétés et la Loi de 2007 sur les impôts.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Michael Prue: I beg leave to present the first report of 2008 from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Prue presents the committee's report and moves the adoption of its recommendations. Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Michael Prue: Very briefly, I would like to thank and commend the members of the committee. They have worked very hard since the Parliament got back to business. We've met on numerous occasions on Wednesdays and will continue to do so. I thank them all for the support they have given to me, to the committee and to the staff who work there as well.

I would move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Debate adjourned.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

RED TAPE REDUCTION POLICY ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LA POLITIQUE DE RÉDUCTION DES FORMALITÉS ADMINISTRATIVES

Mr. Norm Miller moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 121, An Act to require consideration of a red tape reduction policy as a precondition for enacting bills and making regulations and to require a review of Acts and regulations from the viewpoint of the policy / *Projet de loi 121, Loi exigeant de tenir compte d'une politique de réduction des formalités administratives avant d'édicter des projets de loi ou de prendre des règlements et exigeant l'examen des lois et des règlements à la lumière de cette politique.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Norm Miller: As the small-business critic, I hear from many businesses, not just in the riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka but all across the province. They tell me they're suffocating under the weight of regulations and red tape in this province. A recent study by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business says that two out of three businesses say that provincial red tape and regulations have increased in the past three years. Provinces like British Columbia that have taken action have seen an improvement in economic activity, particularly in the small-business area. That's why I've introduced this bill: to take some action.

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STUDENTS AGAINST IMPAIRED AND DISTRACTED DRIVING DAY, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LE JOUR DES ÉTUDIANTS CONTRE LA CONDUITE INATTENTIVE ET L'IVRESSE AU VOLANT

Mr. Levac moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 122, An Act to proclaim Students Against Impaired and Distracted Driving Day / *Projet de loi 122, Loi visant à proclamer le Jour des étudiants contre la conduite inattentive et l'ivresse au volant.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Dave Levac: This bill, if passed, will proclaim the third Tuesday in October in each year as Students

Against Impaired and Distracted Driving Day. This day of commemoration will help support and promote the work done by student organizations that raise awareness, challenge unhealthy attitudes and educate other students, parents and communities of the dangers and consequences of impaired and distracted driving through peer-to-peer education programs and awareness initiatives that promote behavioural changes to improve safety on our roads.

PETITIONS

LOGGING ROUTE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition regarding logging through the village of Restoule. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Nipissing forest management plan proposes to use Hawthorne Drive in Restoule, which features a single-lane bridge and narrow and steep sections; and

"Whereas area residents have grave concerns about community safety, traffic speed, truck noise and general wear and tear of Hawthorne Drive and the bridge in the village of Restoule; and

"Whereas the proposed route travels past the Restoule Canadian Legion and two churches; and

"Whereas alternative routes are possible via Odorizzi Road and Block 09-056;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario put the safety and concerns of the people of Restoule ahead of logging interests and ensure an alternate route is selected for the Nipissing forest management plan."

I support this petition.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital is fully utilized; and

"Whereas Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital is sized to serve a town of Oakville population of 130,000, and the current population is now well over 170,000; and

"Whereas the population of Oakville continues to grow as mandated by 'Places to Grow,' an act of the Ontario Legislature, and is projected to be 187,500 in 2012, the completion date for a new facility in the original time frame; and

"Whereas residents of the town of Oakville are entitled to the same quality of health care as all Ontarians; and

"Whereas hospital facilities in the surrounding area do not have capacity to absorb Oakville's overflow needs;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure take the necessary steps to ensure the new Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital be completed under its original timelines without further delay."

I agree with this petition, I'm pleased to sign my name to it and pass it to page Cole.

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL POLICIES

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the federal government gives more support for economic development, health care and infrastructure to other parts of Canada, and unemployed workers in Ontario get less employment insurance support than in other parts of Canada;

"Whereas the federal system of taxes and equalization extracts over \$20 billion from the people of Ontario every year above and beyond what Ottawa invests in Ontario;

"Whereas laid-off workers in Ontario get \$4,630 less in employment insurance than they would get if they lived in another part of Canada;

"Whereas federal health care money is supposed to be divided equally among all Canadians, but right now Ontario residents are shortchanged by \$773 million per year;

"Whereas the federal government provides economic development support for people living in the north, Atlantic Canada, Quebec and the west, but provides no economic development support for southern Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to demand that the federal government stop gouging the people of Ontario and treat them fairly."

I agree with this petition and sign it, and will give it to page Kevin.

INNISFIL EARLY YEARS CENTRE

Mrs. Julia Munro: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"The Innisfil, Ontario, early years centre offers an essential service to the Innisfil and south Barrie preschoolers, their parents and caregivers;

"It is a vital resource centre that meets the needs of this growing community;

"Additionally, we fear that the Barrie early years centre will be unable to accommodate the increased traffic due to the addition of the Innisfil families to their centre;"

We urge the government to reconsider the decision to close our greatly used and much-needed Innisfil, Ontario, early years centre satellite.

As I am in agreement, I have affixed my signature and give this to page Willem.

DRINKING AND DRIVING

Mr. Frank Klees: "Petition to the Parliament of Ontario:

"Whereas Tyler Mulcahy and his friends lost their lives in a tragic accident that could have been avoided; and

"Whereas young people must learn zero tolerance for drinking and driving to protect themselves from enduring tragedy that will severely impact them, their families and their friends; and

"Whereas, toward this end, young people need to acquire safe and responsible driving habits from as early an age as possible; and

"Whereas improved provincial driving laws can effectively contribute to the process of enhanced driver training and responsible habits among youth in this respect;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to call on the Ontario Ministry of Transportation to enact laws to revoke the licence of drivers 21 years of age and younger with alcohol in their bloodstream, and to also revoke their licence for speeding, for a period of from three months to one year, based upon the determined amount of alcohol or the level of speed involved."

I'm pleased to affix my signature in support of this petition.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Joe Dickson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Rouge Valley Health board reversed the 2006 announcement closing the maternity and pediatric services at the Ajax-Pickering hospital due to an overwhelming public outcry; and

"Whereas the Rouge Valley Health board of directors has recently approved closing the 20-bed mental health unit at the Ajax-Pickering hospital; and

"Whereas there remains further concern by residents for future maternity/pediatric closings ... even with the Ontario Ministry of Health's largest-ever expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital; and

"Whereas there is a natural boundary, the Rouge Valley, that clearly separates the two distinct areas of Scarborough and Durham region;

"We, the undersigned, therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Central East Local Health Integration Network (CE-LHIN) and the Rouge Valley Health System (RVHS) board of directors review the Rouge Valley Health System makeup and group Scarborough Centenary hospital with the three other Scarborough hospitals; and

"Further, that we position Ajax-Pickering hospital within Lakeridge Health, thus" accommodating and "combining all of our hospitals in Durham region under one Durham region administration."

I affix my signature to this and pass it to Shaukat.

EMERGENCY DISPATCH SERVICES

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with 911 services in the Muskoka and Parry Sound area. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is considering relocating emergency ambulance and fire dispatch services currently provided by Muskoka Ambulance Communications Service to the city of Barrie; and

"Whereas up to 40% of all calls received are from cellphones from people unfamiliar with the area; and

"Whereas Parry Sound-Muskoka residents have grave concerns about the effect on emergency response times if dispatch services are provided by dispatchers who are not familiar with the area; and

"Whereas 16 Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care-funded jobs, held by qualified communication officers from local communities, may be lost as a result of the relocation of dispatch services to the city of Barrie,

"Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario put the safety, health and economic concerns of the people of Parry Sound-Muskoka ahead of government efficiency interests and ensure that emergency dispatch services continue to be provided locally by Muskoka Ambulance Communications Service."

I support this petition.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Milton District Hospital was designed to serve a population of 30,000 and the town of Milton is now home to more than 69,000 people," more than double, "and is still growing rapidly; and

"Whereas the town of Milton is the fastest-growing town in Canada and was forced into that rate of growth by an act of the Ontario Legislature called 'Places to Grow'; and

"Whereas the town of Milton is projected to have a population of 101,600 people in 2014, which is the earliest date an expansion could be completed; and

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"Whereas the current Milton facility is too small to accommodate Milton's explosive growth and parts of the hospital prohibit the integration of new outpatient clinics and diagnostic technologies;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure take the necessary steps to ensure timely approval and construction of the expansion to Milton District Hospital."

I agree with this petition, I'm signing my signature, and I'm passing it to page Emily.

HOSPICES

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas hospices on church or hospital property do not pay taxes;

"Whereas hospices are not-for-profit organizations providing emotional, spiritual and bereavement support and respite care to terminally ill individuals and their family members;

"Whereas a residential hospice (usually an eight-to-10 bed home-like facility) provides around-the-clock care to terminally ill individuals and support to their families;

"Whereas hospice services are provided free of charge;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to allow hospices across the province to be exempt from municipal taxes."

I sign my signature and give it to page Shaukat.

BEER RETAILING AND DISTRIBUTION

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the current system, practice and arrangement of retailing and distributing beer in the province of Ontario—and more specifically, the 'near monopoly' of The Beer Store—severely restricts the accessibility, convenience and choice for retail consumers of beer in Ontario; and

"Whereas The Beer Store 'near monopoly' is controlled by 'for-profit, foreign-owned companies' and these companies are not accountable to the people of Ontario, and these companies do not act in the best interests of the people of Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That legislation be introduced that will permit the retailing and distribution of beer through alternative and additional grocery and supermarket retail channels that will fairly compete with The Beer Store, thereby allowing an accessible, convenient, safe, well-regulated and environmentally responsible retailing environment for beer to become established in the province of Ontario."

I agree with this petition. I'd like to sign it and pass it to page Kevin.

SERVICES FOR THE
DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Frank Klees: I have a petition that I'd like to read into the record, delivered to me by Susan Popper, containing some 100-plus signatures.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas many young people with developmental special needs have no meaningful social, recreational or vocational opportunities after high school; and

"Whereas many of these young people have no real options for living independently in the community; and

"Whereas current supports in place are insufficient to meet the needs of these young people;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty government allocate an appropriate level of funding to advance a transformation agenda of individualized funding for adults with developmental special needs in the province of Ontario to allow them to live with dignity and to reach their full potential as members of our communities."

I'm pleased to affix my signature in support of this petition.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

ASSISTANCE TO THE DISABLED

Mr. Ted Arnott: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should address immediately the crisis facing physically disabled Ontarians who are waiting four to 10 years for attendant services by adding attendant services to the provincial wait times strategy and by instituting individually based funding for all physically disabled persons requiring attendant care.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Arnott moves private members' resolution number 55. Pursuant to standing order 97, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Ted Arnott: For some of us in this House, it's easy to become fixated on the hot issues of the day, as defined by the news media: what we see in the paper or what we hear on the news. Some of us occasionally need to be reminded, however, of the need to go back to basics and do what we must do as members of provincial Parliament: listen to our constituents, whether at the hardware store, the coffee shop, after church, perhaps, and of course in our constituency offices, for our first obligation and our most fundamental responsibility is to respond to their concerns and work to improve their quality of life. That is precisely what I would hope to accomplish in moving this resolution today.

Debbie Black is one of my constituents from the Fergus area. She came to my riding office in August to express a concern that for far too long has been off the radar. I'm delighted that Debbie is here with us today, along with her parents, Gord and Glenna Black.

Eleven years ago, Debbie experienced a tragic accident that changed her life. As an incomplete quadriplegic, Debbie is confined to a wheelchair and requires the assistance of attendant service workers in order to carry out many everyday tasks. Assistance with grooming, bathing, going to the washroom and preparing for work are just a few of the essential services they provide to many Ontarians in Debbie's position. Debbie and her wonderful parents, Gord and Glenna Black, are grateful for the attendant services she receives through the

Ontario March of Dimes. However, they pay out of their pocket for additional services to supplement the generosity of the March of Dimes. Of course, the extent and frequency of these services will depend on the individual needs of each client. In all cases, however, those receiving attendant services must be in charge and capable of giving direction as needed. Attendant service workers act essentially as the arms and legs of their clients. In Debbie Black's case, she has a supportive and loving family, and presently they have the means to obtain the additional services she needs over and above what March of Dimes provides. But like any family in this situation, the Blacks have to make financial sacrifices to make this happen.

When Debbie's father, Gord, left my office after that meeting in August in my riding office, he specifically asked me to do what I could to call attention to this problem, and that's what motivated me to bring forward this resolution. I brought forward this resolution to speak up for Debbie Black, but also for the many other Ontarians even less fortunate than she is. I was shocked and appalled to learn that some in her situation are waiting four to 10 long years for the services they need, according to the Ontario Community Support Association.

I'm told that one man living in southwestern Ontario today, for example, is quadriplegic because of a devastating spinal cord injury. While he would have preferred to live at home for three years, and he would have been able to do so if he had adequate attendant services, he remains stuck in a hospital. We know that this care in a hospital setting comes at a cost of approximately \$1,200 a day. He can't go home because he remains on a waiting list for the self-managed attendant service care that he needs. It's estimated that the services he needs to live with dignity in this own home would cost just \$200 a day, a saving to the taxpayer of \$1,000 per day. Surely this fact demands the attention of the Minister of Health whose ministry funds attendant services in Ontario.

With the \$1.3 million spent caring for this man in the hospital for the last three years, the government could have provided attendant services to over 12 other disabled Ontarians. In addition, it could have made available a hospital bed to help cope with the overwhelming demand for hospital services. There are many other real life situations that demand our attention.

Through the Ontario Community Support Association we are told about a 29-year-old man with multiple sclerosis. For the last three years he has lived in a chronic care facility because his community has no age-appropriate housing for those with physical disabilities. Instead of putting his energy and abilities to productive use, the 29-year-old man is sitting in a nursing home. He has few opportunities to interact with other people his own age, something that all of us take for granted. Who among us would want this for ourselves, our friends or our families?

We often hear about the stubbornly long waiting lists for many medical services, but I've never heard of waiting lists ranging from four to 10 years, as is the case

with the attendant services. It should be unacceptable to all of us here. According to Susan Thorning, the CEO of the Ontario Community Support Association, waiting lists are so long that some Ontarians have actually passed away before receiving the services they need. Surely there's a better way, and this House must find it.

The Ontario Community Support Association has examined the issue in great depth and detail. In their report entitled *Unleashing Attendant Services: Enhancing People's Potential, Reducing Wait Times in Acute and Long-Term Health Care*, consultant Cheryl Gorman and the association have provided four recommendations that we have tried to capture with this resolution that I'm moving today.

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Their first recommendation is that the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, along with the local health integration networks, or LHINs, needs to host a special attendant services forum with consumers, providers and relevant provincial associations included. This forum would examine the constraints of the current system and suggest new, more successful and cost-effective ways to meet the needs of disabled Ontarians.

In order to address the unacceptable wait times for attendant services, the Ontario Community Support Association's second recommendation is to add attendant service wait times as a priority within the provincial wait times strategy. It would have the Ontario Health Quality Council report annually on the progress that's being made. Of course, this is a key aspect of the resolution that we're debating today.

Third, Ms. Gorman and the association recommend that the ministry institute individually-based funding for all persons requiring attendant services. This would ensure a secure level of ongoing services to maintain independence and make the services portable, allowing them to follow the client if the client moves. It would secure base stabilization funding for service providers to ensure the ongoing infrastructure and capacity to provide the services needed. Again, this is part of my resolution.

I should note that individually-based funding is not a new concept in Ontario. In fact, developmental services through the Ministry of Community and Social Services are already funded in this way. As compared to most of the funding in the current funding model for attendant services, which provides lump sums to various service agencies regardless of the number of people who actually need the services, individually-based funding just makes sense because it empowers the client.

Their fourth recommendation is for an immediate infusion of additional funding for existing services and clients. Not only are we failing to keep pace with the growing need; we are also failing to keep pace with inflation over the years, for in recent years, attendant service providers have seen their actual spending power decrease by 23%. Today, I'm told that attendant service workers earn between \$14 and \$18 an hour for what is often sensitive and part-time work.

At a time of surging demand for services and limited human resources, this funding challenge is becoming un-

manageable, but, as I mentioned, reallocating our funding to attendant services should lead to a net savings for the taxpayer. In its October 21 editorial endorsement of my resolution, the *Guelph Mercury* called it "a cost-effective, humane solution."

It makes sense to allow people to move out of expensive hospital and long-term-care facilities into less expensive and more appropriate homes that suit their needs and aspirations. In many cases, this would mean entering supportive housing environments under an arrangement that is flexible, efficient and cost-effective. But this is just one possibility that we must explore, and I would hope we could do that through an attendant services forum, which the Ontario Community Support Association has called upon us to convene.

I know that the association would also want me to inform the House of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This convention declares that persons with disabilities must have access to a range of in-home, residential and other community support services, including personal assistance necessary to support living and inclusion in the community and to prevent isolation or segregation from the community. The House of Commons in Ottawa unanimously ratified this convention in April, earlier this year. But I ask: Have we in Ontario done our part? Have we done our best to achieve its spirit, its clarion call for action?

Today there are just under 2,000 Ontarians living in supportive housing. They are already receiving some attendant services, but many require additional care. The funding dedicated to supportive housing is reaching existing clients, but it is not opening new spaces for new clients, and that's a serious problem.

For the people who need them, attendant services are not optional; they are absolutely necessary. They are absolutely necessary for physically disabled Ontarians to lead fulfilling lives. In spite of their disabilities, they have so much to contribute. We need their talents. We need their participation in our economy, our communities and our society.

In addition, the services are absolutely necessary so that clients' families can spend more of their own time as they choose. That is why this is a priority for me. It's a priority that Ontarians must address, even in the face of a financial crisis and even as we face so many other challenges.

I believe that we can deliver individually based attendant services according to individual need. I believe we can do it right across the province, and we can make this funding portable so that families are free to live in the communities they choose.

As I hope I've demonstrated this afternoon, we can do this efficiently and affordably, according to service models that have already been proven effective. There are hundreds of our fellow citizens who deserve better. Debbie Black and her family deserve better. Our great province can do better, it must do better and it will do better.

I look forward to the participation of other members of this House as we continue to debate this matter for the

next just under an hour, Mr. Speaker, and I thank you very much for giving me this opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It will be an honour to speak to this initiative by the member from Wellington-Halton Hills, and I certainly commend him for his concern. This is an ongoing problem in this province and getting worse, and I think he pointed that out quite beautifully.

In my own riding, I have a group we are working with now called the Summit Group, a group of parents dealing with children who have disabilities. Their problem, in a sense, is that they care too much. Their children have graduated from school, and a lot of the supports that were built in to the school system are dropping off. The question is: What do these young people do now?

There are initiatives across the city but none in our particular riding—we're working to change that—and they are having to drive halfway across the city to take part in Variety Village exercises, for example. Certainly there's very little in the way of work ventures, of involvement—again, all needing special help, but all quite possible. These are children who could be productive members of our community.

The other aspect—and this, of course, is the overriding aspect of life with disabilities in this province—is the ODSP system, which I think is quite horrendous, and the fact that on ODSP an individual makes about \$12,000 a year when the poverty line is \$19,000 a year. What this government is in effect saying to those with disabilities is that they are condemned to live below the poverty line.

We in the New Democratic Party have been talking about this, it seems, month in and month out for the duration of the current government, and quite frankly we demanded an increase of at least 31% to those living on ODSP in our last election platform. It is absolutely immoral, unethical and unconscionable that we would condemn those with disabilities who cannot work—that's the definition—to a life of poverty. Imagine trying to live in the city of Toronto on about \$999 a month; there are many in my riding who do so. That includes shelter, food, everything.

The member quite rightly pointed out that housing is one of the major problems for those on disability. To be able to live a productive life with supports, certain housing is needed—supportive housing. Precious few supportive housing initiatives have happened in the last five years—one can even extend that to the last decades.

Right now in the province of Ontario, we have 125,000 families on the waiting list for affordable housing. So, of course, those with disabilities are caught up in that mix. They are caught up needing housing—needing a particular kind of housing—like everyone else.

My husband and I were in Europe, and one of the countries we visited was Sweden—I've spoken about it often, because it's so much better than here in many ways. One of the things they do in Sweden is pay relatives who are capable and able to take training to look after their family members in need. They pay them a

salary. Quite frankly, as the member pointed out, even that salary is far less expensive than institutionalizing that member of the family, and of course, in many cases it is a great deal more humane. Most people who have disabilities would rather stay at home, and most families would rather have their family member stay at home, as long as the supports are in place—that is the critical factor. Anyone who has tried to look after someone with a disability knows it is a full-time job. Anyone who has tried to look after a senior, for that matter, with a disability at home knows it's a full-time job. And it deserves recompense. That, quite frankly, is a position that we in the New Democratic Party take very seriously: that the recompense and the training be in place; that this not just be any caregiver but a caregiver that's trained, that's unionized, that, of course, is covered by all of the same benefits that any other worker is covered by. It's important work; it should be valued and rewarded as such.

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So certainly, what we have now is a completely substandard response for the problem of those with disabilities and the problems of those living with those with disabilities. It's a very callous government that would try to build an economy on the backs of those with disabilities; in other words, trying to save a penny here, a pound there, because someone who's living with disabilities is living below the poverty line. We would hope that our friends across the aisle are not attempting to do that and are open to doing something for those with the plights that the member from Wellington-Halton Hills described so well.

Here's where a bit of a problem lies for us, however, with this particular motion. We in the New Democratic Party don't think that only those with disabilities should be bumped up in the queue, so to speak, in wait time strategy. We think, quite frankly, that all of those on wait lists should not have to be on wait lists for the health services and the attendant services that they need—not only those with disabilities. We think it's unconscionable that people should be waiting for necessary surgeries. We think it's unconscionable that people should be waiting for any necessary health care response. It clearly costs more in the long run. It makes no sense. It may save, again, a few pennies in the short run, but certainly we know that those who do not get timely medical intervention in a number, a host, of different medical problems will only get worse with time, that the situation becomes more dire month to month. So we feel that it's not a question of just those with disabilities—although of course the situation for those with disabilities is particularly grievous, but so is the situation for those with cancer; so is the situation for those with heart disease; so is the situation for those seniors who are languishing in our emergency wards who are trying to get into long-term care.

These are all situations that need address, and so we think that a comprehensive restructure of what we're looking at when we look at health care in this province in terms of wait times needs to happen. There's absolutely

no reason why anybody should be sitting in emergency rooms waiting for six, seven, eight hours, sometimes longer, for the care that they need, whatever their situation. If they are ill, they need to be seen and they need to be seen in a timely fashion. If they need an operation, they need that operation in a timely fashion. This is clearly life and death for many.

Getting back to those with disabilities: Of course, it's a particular instance and it's a particularly, as I've said, grievous instance. The member brought this home very clearly. Again, I know because I've worked with many in our riding who are particular activists around this. They struggle with just the overhead of trying to keep a child who has a disability at home—it's usually a child—or, even better, as they reach the age of maturity, trying to get them into supportive housing where they can have somebody checking up on them. Supportive housing doesn't exist, the recompense for looking after them at home doesn't exist, and they don't want to be in a position where they are forced to put them in an institution—even if they have to wait for that institution, no matter how long the wait list is—just to get the care they need.

So, clearly, there's a wide range of services that we need to institute as quickly as possible for those with disabilities in our midst. It's clear that wait times—period—are a problem in this province, certainly a problem in this province where we have a million Ontarians without a family doctor; there's an issue that needs to be looked at. This is one piece of that great puzzle, if you will, of the lack of response from the McGuinty Liberal government to those with health problems across the board. Certainly for those who suffer from disabilities or who have family members, this is particularly egregious.

I commend the member from Wellington–Halton Hills for bringing this forward. I commend the inspiration behind the bill. Unfortunately, we will not be supporting it because we don't, in the New Democratic Party, believe in a piecemeal approach to health care. As the father of medicare, Tommy Douglas, said, "You're always going to have to fight the battle of medicare every generation," and we're fighting it again. We're fighting against increasing privatization and increasing cutbacks. We're fighting against any attempt on any government's part, including the McGuinty government, to build an economic response on the backs of those who need our services the most; that is, the poor, the disabled, seniors and the young. We've seen examples in this government of doing all of the above.

Again, commendations for the member for bringing it forward. Unfortunately, we won't be able to, in its present form, support it, but certainly we support the impulse behind it and support those who are struggling with disabilities across this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I'm very pleased to join in in the debate today and commend the member from Wellington–Halton Hills for raising this important issue on the floor of the Legislature today.

As I begin my comments, I want to provide this Legislature with a bit of background and context as to where we are in respect to those who get community service support. There are over 800 community service agencies funded by the government providing service to over 650,000 Ontarians. These agencies enable seniors, the frail elderly and persons with physical disabilities and chronic disease to live independently in the community, as we would hope for each of our family members and friends to have that opportunity to do.

The local health integrated networks fund approximately 170 not-for-profit service providers to provide assisted living services in supportive housing across Ontario to over 10,500 clients, more than 80% of whom are frail, elderly or cognitively impaired. I know that those organizations in my community do incredibly wonderful work.

Acquired brain injury services are provided by approximately 30 agencies in Ontario, and we too in Etobicoke–Lakeshore are blessed to have some really wonderful ABI services available to members in our community.

We've increased funding to community support services by about \$203 million since we took office in 2003. The LHINs are working with the local service providers to find the right mix and balance and quantity of services to meet the needs of people residing within their geographic area. They have a number of tools to be able to do that. They have attendant outreach services and assisted living services in supportive housing which provide personal support, homemaking, attendant service and core components of independent life training services.

We also have self-managed direct funding, which is funding for attendant services to allow people with physical disabilities to hire and supervise their own attendant workers. This includes 24-hour assisted-living support services provided to individuals with physical disability, cognitive impairment, the elderly and those living with the effects of HIV and AIDS.

We've also increased and made significant investments in home care and increased investments in home care by \$573 million since 2003-04 and expanded that service to 220,000 more Ontarians since 2003.

We've launched what I believe is a groundbreaking aging-at-home strategy to meet the needs of our aging population. It is a \$1.1-billion strategy over four years to provide supports and services to seniors to allow them to stay in their own homes.

Another interesting innovation is to have the aging-at-home strategy purchase 100 new Dodge Caravans, made in Windsor, to provide transportation for 135,000 seniors and others needing health care services.

So we have come a long way since 2003, but we know that there is still more to do. I was encouraged to learn more about the issues that we are debating in the Legislature today and to speak to today's resolution as a result of the leadership of one of my constituents. I want to pay tribute to his history of hard work and advocacy in the

Legislature today. My constituent, Ian Parker, sent me extensive information with respect to the issue that we are debating today. I want to acknowledge that in the mid-1990s, he was part of a group of leaders who worked as the Attendant Care Action Coalition with the Centre for Independent Living to develop the direct funding program, this innovative program that has enabled hundreds of Ontario citizens with disabilities to live in the community and manage and self-direct their own support and care. It has saved government thousands of dollars, but most importantly, it has made possible the opportunities for employment, education, citizen involvement and quality lives.

1400

I want to acknowledge another one of my constituents, Dr. Diane Clapham, who also sent me a note with respect to this resolution today. I want to acknowledge the good work and advocacy being done by the Ontario Community Support Association, which has been working and mobilizing the community and, most importantly, responding to the needs of those in our community who need assistance and support to live independently.

I'm very proud to be part of a government that has worked hard, constantly and consistently and steadily, to increase services for those who need them, to continue to protect our health care system, to improve our system, not because it's a system, but because it speaks to and meets the needs of those of us who turn to that care. In Ontario, we are very proud of the health care services that we have available. We want to nurture and protect them.

I commend the member for Wellington-Halton Hills for bringing forward an important component of the health care provided in our province. We will continue on this side of the House to work very hard to make sure that we continue to move forward in providing that comprehensive health care service to all Ontarians.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It's a pleasure to rise today to support the member for Wellington-Halton Hills on this important resolution to add attendant services to the provincial wait time strategy.

For many years, experts in health care have told members of all three parties that our health system is too focused on hospital beds. Hospitals provide wonderful acute care for the citizens of this province, but it is the most expensive setting for health care service delivery and, quite frankly, not the best type of care for stable individuals with a disability.

As the Ontario Community Support Association highlighted in their August 13 press conference, people on the attendant services wait list put pressure on the health care system because they remain inappropriately stuck waiting in long-term-care homes, acute care beds, chronic care hospitals and rehabilitation facilities, all at a much higher cost to taxpayers. It's important that members in this House recognize that a failure to support today's resolution to make attendant services a priority by adding

it to the provincial wait time strategy will result in higher costs to the taxpayer.

At the same news conference in August, the Ontario Community Support Association told us that the wait list for attendant services is four to 10 years. For four to 10 years, individuals with disabilities and their families are not getting the services they need. They remain in hospital or long-term-care beds, or their families, many with aging parents, struggle to continue to provide for their daily care needs. So even though we know that it is more cost-effective and more appropriate to have individuals cared for at home and even though we know attendant services allow people with physical disabilities to actively participate in their communities, go to school, get a job and contribute in other ways, we continue to focus our health care dollars in other areas.

This issue is most important across the province, but it also touches specific families in Dufferin-Caledon. This summer, I met with a constituent from Honeywood who receives the Ministry of Health's direct funding for attendant services. I suppose you could call her one of the lucky ones. The program is administered by the Centre for Independent Living in Toronto. She tells me it took four years for her application to be approved, and this year, when she applied for a slight modification of her level of care because her health had changed, she was told that the Centre for Independent Living in Toronto was not even considering 2008 applications; they were still reviewing 2007 applications. Why is that? The Centre for Independent Living has a huge waiting list, and this Liberal government has not increased their funding since they were elected in 2003. So CILT is trying to serve as many Ontarians as it can with too few resources. In fact, my constituent believes that something needs to happen—long-term care or worse—for an individual with direct funding before the next person on the waiting list can receive funding for attendant services. My constituent wanted me to know that she feels this is a wonderful program that allows her to routinely participate in the community and live in her home. For example, I know that she is an active member of the Dufferin county accessibility advisory committee, and the Honeywood community. She came to see me because she wanted to brief me on this issue, and she believes that other people with a physical disability need to have the same opportunity that she has.

In addition to direct funding not being a priority for the Ministry of Health, my constituents are also having issues with funding from community care access centres. The boundary change introduced by the Liberal government has resulted in my constituents being asked to do with less service. Their disability has not changed, but the level of service being provided has.

An Orangeville resident who is a quadriplegic as a result of a car accident had been receiving home care since 1995. Under the former Waterloo-Wellington-Dufferin CCAC, he received morning and night visits, seven days a week, to assist with personal care. Under Central West CCAC, he was discharged from nursing

and occupational therapy. Respite care was eliminated. His case is under review to determine what other services can be cut. The minister responded to us in correspondence by suggesting that he use the CCAC complaint process and to call the long-term-care action line.

Another constituent who happens to suffer from ALS has been told he was receiving too much care from the Waterloo-Wellington-Dufferin CCAC. He's been told his CCAC hours are being cut and a referral has been made to the March of Dimes to make up the care hour difference. That's right. The CCAC is referring people to a non-profit agency and expects them to provide front-line care, rather than our universal health care system. The March of Dimes also has a waiting list. So now the Central West CCAC has agreed to provide attendant care hours, but only until the March of Dimes can implement its services. He also needs respite care hours, but of course there's no support for his wife.

All three of these examples are alarming. I'm sure that members of all three parties have similar experiences from their own ridings. So what are we going to do about it? Now is the time to look at implementing the change that health care experts have been advocating for more than a decade. Now is the time to provide Ontarians with physical disabilities with the services they deserve. These citizens can either be taken care of at home with the right resources for less money or be forced into long-term care, or a hospital setting, which puts added strain on an already beleaguered health system and doesn't allow individuals with disabilities to fully participate in our communities.

I encourage all members to support the resolution of the member from Wellington-Halton Hills. Let's make attendant care services a priority by adding it to the provincial wait time strategy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Leal: Indeed, it is a delight to have the opportunity to get a few words on record this afternoon for the resolution that's been presented by my colleague from Wellington-Halton Hills.

I really want to just talk about a hometown hero for a moment, in the riding of Peterborough, a lady I know very well. Her name is Lois Harte-Maxwell.

Lois Harte-Maxwell is an individual who contracted polio as a child. Fortunately enough, she made a reasonable recovery from that. Unfortunately, now she suffers from post-polio syndrome, but through her adult life, her marriage to Don, her two children, Laurie and Paul, who are good friends of mine, she became such a strong advocate for opportunities for people with disabilities, and certainly for attendant care and building housing in the Peterborough community.

I got to know Lois very well in about 1982. One of her chief concerns at that time was people with disabilities who couldn't get access to Peterborough city hall to actually see the municipal government in action. So she, along with a group of other people, banded together to force the city council in 1982 to put an elevator in

Peterborough city hall to provide access to municipal government.

And then she took it beyond the next step. In 1985 I joined Lois, and she and I were both elected in the same year to the Peterborough city council. During that time, she became a strong advocate. One of the areas that she spent a lot of time at, and was very successful with, was the area of housing. She joined, together with a number of other individuals, to give credit where credit is due, with the provincial and federal governments of the day and developed Kawartha Participation Projects, which is supportive housing in the city of Peterborough, and indeed put in place a plan with the appropriate support services, particularly for those adults who went through the experience that Lois had with polio, and then eventually suffering from post-polio syndrome, which many people experience in their later years. She was able to put together a very wide range in the team of people to make that a very successful project. Currently it's under the directorship of Catherine Blackwell, and I invite members of this House any time, if they happen to visit the riding of Peterborough, and particularly the city of Peterborough, to take the opportunity to visit this housing complex, which is in many ways unique in Ontario and has been able to pick up a number of individuals that, as my friend from Wellington-Halton Hills has certainly articulated very well, would have been on a wait-list for a considerable period of time.

1410

Indeed, I also had the opportunity to work with Danielle Belair, the executive director of Community Care Peterborough, and we are one of the lucky recipients of one of the brand new Dodge Grand Caravans built in Windsor, Ontario. That has been a really great success story and has allowed individuals who have limited mobility to gain access to a whole variety of services within our community.

The other thing is, as the member I've certainly tried to press with the local Central East LHIN, under the directorship of Debbie Hammons—she is relatively new—to look at this issue of wait times for people who need attendant care. It is a serious matter and it's appropriate that the member has brought forward this resolution to discuss it today.

We have, I think with any reasonable objective analysis, certainly made some headway in terms of wait times. I'm fortunate enough to have a brand new hospital in Peterborough, and through investments in there, in terms of hip and knee replacement and MRI/CT scans, we've seen a reduction in those wait times. We should take the opportunity through the public policy process to go beyond what is the logical next step, in terms of wait times, in the province of Ontario. No doubt it will take a significant investment of financial resources to reduce those wait times.

I know on the children's side there were significant wait times. We have the provincially famous Five Counties Children's Centre located in Peterborough. There was a significant wait-list there, and we were able

to free up some resources under the directorship of Diane Pick, the executive director of Five Counties Children's Centre, who does a remarkable job, particularly with children with a wide range of disabilities, in the five counties catchment area. To be honest, there is still a wait time there, but we have been able to really put a dent in that wait-list to allow those parents to get their kids in for the services that are really needed.

I also chat with Alan Vallillee, the executive of Kinark Child and family Services in my riding of Peterborough. Again there was a question of extensive wait times, and we've made the investment in resources to start to reduce that. Frankly, the member from Wellington-Halton Hills brings an important issue in front of us today and, looking down the road, to put a strategy in place to reduce those wait times.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise in support of the resolution by the member from Wellington-Halton Hills on this very important topic.

To start with, the member from Wellington-Halton Hills's local paper says it best in the headline of their editorial in support of this resolution. It says that it's "A Cost-Effective, Humane Solution." I think it's very important to recognize in this debate that it's a "solution" that needs solving, and everyone in this House and everyone in attendance here would recognize that this is a problem that needs to be dealt with. I don't think of the word "humane" at first blush—maybe that's not quite the way we wanted to express it, but I don't think it's humane to have someone needing attention, and expecting that the wait-list for that attention in our health care system should be between four and 10 years.

It goes without saying that it seems kind of odd that we would even need to have a resolution that says we want this added to a provincial government's wait-time strategy. One would think it would be automatic that a strategy would be in place to reduce that wait time well below four years, as opposed to from four to 10 years. It seems totally unreasonable to do that.

The other part, of course, is that it is so important to provide individually based funding—I think "fiscally prudent" is what the Minister of Finance would say—because that is the most prudent way to deal with this situation. Not only is it the best way for the individual, but it's the best way to provide services too, so that people can purchase services or provide needed services the way people want them delivered. I think self-directed funding is the only way to go at times like this, and there is a case to be made for that.

I just wanted to very quickly point out that before this debate I had the member from Wellington-Halton Hills give me some information. He gave me the brochure from the Ontario Community Support Association. It has a lot of information in it about self-directed funding, but it also has a number of case studies, and I just wanted to point out one in particular for the record:

"In 2004, 'Don' entered hospital with complications arising from his earlier spinal cord injury that resulted in

quadriplegia. He has been ready for discharge since March 2005, yet living in a hospital for over three years because he is on a lengthy wait-list for self-managed attendant service direct funding in his home. The cost per day for Don to be in the hospital is \$1,200, or \$438,000 per year"—almost half a million dollars a year.

"Don is extremely frustrated because he knows he could be in his own home with the right services he needs at a cost of \$200 per day—six hours of service during the day and an attendant available overnight. The hospital bed could have been freed up to reduce the wait lists for surgeries and Don would have been independent in his own home.

"The additional cost to taxpayers to date as a result of Don not being able to access the right service in the right place at the right time has been over \$1.3 million over three years. The additional inappropriate hospital costs could have provided attendant services to 12 people per year."

It seems rather silly that we're here today debating this resolution, and I very much appreciate its coming forward, but we're debating a resolution on whether the government should be moving ahead to provide more attendant care in the home, because it may be costly. This would tell me that there are a lot more people who could provide savings to provide more attendant care for people in the home, and the brochure refers to that. I think that deals with the money part of the resolution, and I support him for bringing it forward.

As the member from Wellington-Halton Hills pointed out, we all receive people coming into our offices to talk about the problem of insufficient attendant care in the home. I too have had those in, and I have a number of people I want to refer to.

Jean McLeod does have attendant care in the home but wants to have self-directed funding. She has had cerebral palsy for quite a number of years, and she believes and knows she could provide more and better care if she could direct it where and when she wants it, as opposed to the way it is presently being provided. Yet, because of the structure, and no great incentive or initiative on behalf of government to change the system so she can have self-directed, she has waited for over two years for approval to get the same funding—less cost—provided to her in her home.

The Chesney family have a very disabled and needy son, Brock, who lives not too far away from the riding of Wellington-Halton Hills. He is now 21, and they can no longer care for him by themselves within their home without some help. Yet, because of the waiting list for funding, they can't get that help. The end result will be that he will have to find a group home, where he doesn't want to be, and there will be nobody there to look after him.

I want to close—I notice my time is gone. I've got a number of letters from people who made presentations on Bill 77, objecting to spending more money on bureaucracy and less on front-line care. One family member wrote: "Staying in a family environment is very impor-

tant to any handicapped child or adult, and I would not want to resort to putting these children in government-run group homes. My whole life revolves around these handicapped children and I also do relief for three medically involved children.” This is a lady who has seven developmentally challenged children living in her home, and that’s the way she feels about keeping them at home and getting the attendant care that this member is talking about. I wholeheartedly support it.

1420

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate? Seeing none, Mr. Arnott, you have up to two minutes for your response.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I want to thank the members who participated in this important debate this afternoon: the member for Parkdale–High Park, Cheri DiNovo; the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore, Laurel Broten, who is also, I understand, the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health; the member for Dufferin–Caledon, Sylvia Jones; the member for Peterborough, Jeff Leal; and the member for Oxford, Ernie Hardeman.

I listened intently to all of their presentations this afternoon and want to respond especially to the member for Parkdale–High Park. I understand and recognize that she has some questions with respect to this motion, but I also know that the NDP health critic, the member for Nickel Belt, France Gélinas, has in the past expressed strong support for the Ontario Community Support Association and its report; in fact, the member for Nickel Belt helped to organize and participate in a press conference in this building back in the month of August. So I am hoping that the NDP will support this motion. Hopefully, I have addressed the issues that they brought forward.

I also want to express my appreciation to my legislative assistant, Stephen Yantzi, who has worked with me as we’ve developed this idea. He has worked very hard to help me prepare and organize my thoughts and assist me in the drafting of the speech that I gave this afternoon.

I especially want to thank Debbie, Gord and Glenna Black, my constituents who came down—it was quite a significant undertaking for them to come here today and I really appreciate that—as well as the other members of the Ontario Community Support Association who have joined us here this afternoon.

I urge all MPPs to take this issue seriously, to support the motion. My hope is that if we get the unanimous support of the House, then we will be in a position to express that support directly to the government, to the Premier and the Minister of Finance and others, as we work toward developing a provincial budget in the upcoming year. We expect the budget to be read in this House in March, and we’ve got some time to continue to bring this issue forward. I certainly hope to be in a position to do that to make a meaningful difference in the lives of the people we’re speaking about today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I’ll just remind the people in the galleries and the people who are

watching us at home that Mr. Arnott’s ballot item will be voted on in about 100 minutes.

AUDITOR GENERAL AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LE VÉRIFICATEUR GÉNÉRAL

Mrs. Munro moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 110, An Act to amend the Auditor General Act /
Projet de loi 110, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le vérificateur
général.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order 98, Mrs. Munro, you have up to 12 minutes for your presentation.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I want to begin by saying that for many years I have spoken out in this House and outside this House about the chronic underfunding of high-growth areas in Ontario. This is by no means a new problem. I do not expect that the funding of social services, health and infrastructure will ever keep up exactly with growth, but what I do expect is that the government should try, that its goals should be to eliminate disparities as quickly as possible, and that gaps in funding should shrink, not grow.

I would like to outline for this House the reasons for this bill. Let me begin by dealing with the challenges that high-growth areas face and why we would like to bring the Auditor General into the discussion.

Growth is both a source of jobs and prosperity but also challenges. So long as our population grows through immigration and natural increase, we will face issues with growth. Shrinking household size also leads to growth as more single people live in their own homes. For residents in York–Simcoe and similar areas, the issue is not just growth, but rapid growth. For decades, Toronto, from the south, and Barrie, from the north, have been pushing into the communities in my riding.

The United Way of York Region has written a thoughtful document about the challenges of the rapid growth of York region. It is called “...if addressed.” Their introduction says, “In an increasingly urban region with all its rich diversity, strategic investments in the pace, face and place of growth will improve quality of life for all York region residents if addressed.”

Growth can be good if government addresses the needs of areas that grow. In the last 30 years, York region has grown from a little over 200,000 population to almost a million people. To give that some kind of context, let me describe it to you in the way that others have, and that is that the growth in York region is equal to a full busload of people arriving daily.

Popular stereotypes often portray York region as a wealthy area with no social problems or needs, yet the 2006 census has indicated, as reported in a regional council report, that one in eight regional residents “face or are at risk of facing economic hardships due to low

income.” This represents an increase of 55% from the 2001 census. About 29% of the residents living in low-income households are children under the age of 18 years. The United Way reports that the 905 region gets \$346 per capita for child care, while other areas get \$707 per capita. Keep in mind that the 905 is the area in Ontario with the most young families: Vaughan, Markham and Richmond Hill rank second, third and fourth in Canada for the highest proportion of married couples with children. For children’s services, areas outside the 905 get \$693, and inside the 905 get \$287, again in an area full of young children.

I have already raised in this House the threatened closure of the Early Years centre in Innisfil. Barrie and Simcoe county suffer from the same underfunding as the 905. Not only is this centre at risk, but it takes in many of its children from Barrie because the centre in Barrie is full to bursting. In fact, this very afternoon during petitions, I read a petition on the issue of the Early Years centre, and just for the sake of argument, I looked at the signatures on this single page; 19 out of 22 signatures came from Barrie. I think that speaks very strongly for the fact that this is indeed a centre that needs that kind of support.

The York Region Children’s Aid Society wrote to the minister in March, saying that the 8.5% of Ontario children who live in York region receive about 2.5% of child welfare funding. So what this means is that, on the other side of Steeles Avenue, 18% of the province’s total children in care receive 21% of the total funding, while in York region, that 8% receive less than 3% of the funding. They have to provide services in an increasing number of languages to a rapidly growing population.

Similar funding problems exist across the spectrum of children’s services, particularly for mental health and developmental disabilities. York region and Simcoe county are just two of the high-growth areas not receiving an equal share of government funding for social services, health care and infrastructure.

The Growing Communities Healthcare Alliance provided me with a lot of information about the problems that high-growth areas face and the statistics to back their concerns. They provided information to me about the local health integration network which covers the majority of people in my riding. This LHIN receives the fifth-lowest funding of all local health integration networks in Ontario. For every dollar the average Ontario resident is funded, residents of the Central LHIN get 77 cents. Community care access centre funding per resident: a dollar for Ontario, 93 cents for my residents. Community mental health funding: a dollar for Ontario, about 80 cents in my riding. Addiction funding is only 20 cents on the dollar. These types of numbers are repeated all across high-growth areas of Ontario.

1430

The Growing Communities Healthcare Alliance recommends three key priorities for high-growth areas. The first one: Speed up implementation of hospital growth funding commitment and provide adequate and

ongoing social services growth funding. Second: Quickly implement the health-based allocation model, population-needs-based funding for provincial health care funding and develop population-needs-based funding for social services. Develop a health care and social services plan for Ontario to complement Places to Grow.

Constituents contact me all the time about health delays, difficulties finding a doctor and their dissatisfaction with their level of service. A doctor in my riding has tried several times to set up a family health team in Georgina. He has been rebuffed at every opportunity by the government’s health officials, all of this in an underserved area. Even worse, we learned in your economic statement that you will be delaying the establishment of new family health teams in order to save money. There is a fear that this really means cancelling them by the time you introduce a budget next spring.

Your economic statement also cancelled increases in nursing. High-growth areas will suffer from this cut the most as they are the areas in the direst need. Government cuts to school construction in the economic statement will also hit my area. It is high-growth areas that need new schools.

The problems are clear. Unfortunately, this government is unwilling to provide the funding needed for necessary solutions. My suggestion is to include the Auditor General in the discussion. As an impartial officer of the Legislature, the auditor is trusted by everyone. My bill would give him the opportunity to include issues of equitable funding in his annual reports to the House. Subsection 12(2) of the current Auditor General Act outlines those matters the auditor must put in his annual report. My bill would alter the part of the section which describes matters that the auditor should bring to the attention of the assembly if he believes them to be important. If my bill is passed, it would give the power to the auditor to report on equitable funding; it would not require him to do so. I’m willing to trust the auditor’s judgment on these issues.

I urge other members of this House to support my bill, give the auditor the power and then trust him to use his best judgment. Let him tell us if the needs of high-growth areas are being met. Growth is not a bad or a good thing; it is simply a reflection of the change in our society. David Fleischer of the York Region Media Group, speaking of York region but with a quote that applies to many high-growth areas, said in 2007, “Growth may be the single defining characteristic of York region, but what is often lost in the equation is that suburbia is not endless homes and malls; it is people and families.”

I could not agree more. My constituency is in a high-growth area, but its growth is people and families, and they deserve the same, equal treatment as everyone in Ontario. Giving the Auditor General the power to report on the equitable provision of programs and services means that every year an impartial, unimpeachable authority will tell us if the government is spending its money fairly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you very much. Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's my pleasure to rise to discuss this bill. I'm glad I had the opportunity to hear the member speak about the context within which she's brought forward this piece of legislation. It's interesting to me as an MPP who represents a downtown Toronto riding where we have some social infrastructure, and in particular I'll talk about affordable housing. I have had to deal in the past with the simple reality that people who live in the 905 who find themselves for whatever reason—family misfortune, illness, loss of work—unable to afford their rent, or their mortgage, who need shelter and need affordable housing, so often come into the city of Toronto for that housing. When I've gone to Barrie and talked to people there in the shelter and looked at the very limited amount of social infrastructure that's available, I understand the point that Mrs. Munro is making, that in fact there is a deficit in social infrastructure throughout that region.

I think it is incumbent upon the government—set aside the auditor for the moment—any government that is managing growth, to look not only at the hard infrastructure of roads, sewers, water mains and electricity but also to look at the social infrastructure—the health, educational and housing infrastructure—because it is just as vital to the life of a community as all the others.

No question that in the short run, if you don't have roads, you're going to notice it very fast, but over the long run, in terms of stable families and stable social conditions, you have to have the child care centres, you have to have the parent-child centres, you have to have the family health teams, the community health centres and you have to have the affordable housing. They are part of what makes a society work in this 21st century. I think it was useful that we were given the context.

The bill itself: We in the NDP agree with the member that the Legislature needs objective, appropriate and timely information on government spending and it needs it on programs, including whether or not all regions are receiving a fair and balanced allocation of funds. I think it's a very strong argument, in fact, in this province for increased investment in child care, increased investment in health care. It's my hope that all parties facing the budget that's coming, dealing with the budget statement that we're handling right now, will support the investment in social infrastructure that's needed to make sure that families all across Ontario have reasonably equitable access to those elements of social infrastructure.

To fully appreciate the potential role of the Auditor General in assessing regional fairness, you have to look at the role of the Auditor General. The role of the Auditor General is to assess whether the government is doing a good job managing the public purse and examining government spending. I would say that all of us, on every side in this Legislature, have looked at the reports of the Auditor General over time. Because it's my critic portfolio, I noticed the one on management of hazardous waste. His report there was striking, one that I hope at some point would result in further action from the government in power. So I understand why Mrs. Munro

would come forward and say that the Auditor General's assessment of a situation strengthens the hand that she has to play politically when she is fighting for this social infrastructure investment.

1440

Each year, the Auditor General tables an annual report which provides legislators with information that allows them to judge how well public resources are being used. Essentially, the Auditor General does the work for this Legislature of watching over the administration of Ontario's finances and helps elected representatives hold the government of the day accountable for the way it administers the resources that this Legislature allocates to it.

Those of us here in the legislative chamber may have a variety of skills and talents, but the skill and the time and the resources to actually go through and see that money is spent appropriately and in line with the legislation that has been passed has got to be done by a specialized branch, and frankly, the Auditor General has been given those resources, that power, that responsibility. The Auditor General is, overall, to report on spending—whether it's done appropriately, whether there's value for money—and he is to report on instances of misuse or mismanagement of public funds, overexpenditures and other irregularities.

I would take it that in this bill that's being brought forward, in some ways he's being asked to take into account a particular aspect of the way money is allocated in this province, and that's to make sure that it's allocated on an equitable basis across every region of this province.

The Auditor General is also charged with assessing whether public resources are well administered, whether government and broader public sector activities are managed with due regard to economy and efficiency, and whether procedures to measure and report on the effectiveness of programs and organizations have been established and are operating satisfactorily—in fact, the value-for-money assessment that an Auditor General is responsible for.

We don't see any great harm in adding a provision explicitly mandating the auditor to examine how equitable, in regional terms, the government spending program is, in his annual report. It's not completely clear to us that his mandate currently prevents making such assessments. So I leave it to the member. She has brought forward a bill making it explicit, giving direction, and assigning a higher political profile to this particular task. But it may already be the case that, legally, this Legislature could be directing the Auditor General without requirement for legislation.

There are other opportunities that may lie in the role of Auditor General in his various other duties. I'm going to go through some of the main duties of the Auditor General so that we can talk about the opportunities that the Auditor General has to comment on the question of regional fairness, regional equity.

An extremely important part of the Auditor General's mandate is the value-for-money component. Value-for-

money audits are assessments of whether or not money was spent with due regard for economy and efficiency and whether appropriate procedures were in place to measure and report on the effectiveness of government programs. Under the Auditor General Act, the office is required to report to the Legislature significant instances where it is observed that the government is not fulfilling its responsibilities in these areas. To fulfill its value-for-money mandate, the office annually conducts audits of selected ministry or agency programs and activities. Major programs and activities are generally audited every five years or so.

It is important to remember that the value-for-money mandate now includes organizations in the broader public sector that receive government grants, and those are hospitals, colleges, universities, school boards and other organizations meeting the definition of grant recipient.

The expanded mandate also allows the auditor to conduct value-for-money audits of crown-controlled corporations, such as the new hydro corporations that began operating in 1999 after the restructuring of Ontario Hydro.

It may be the case that there is already scope for the Auditor General to do regional impact assessments in these value-for-money audits. He may well find that the way that the money is allocated in the province is not giving us maximum value and is not dealing with greatest need. Frankly, if he finds that, then this government would have the responsibility to address that inequity, address the fact that needs are not being taken care of, address the fact that in fast-growing areas in the 905 the social infrastructure that needs to be there is not being put in place with the speed and with the fullness that real social needs require.

My understanding is that under the Auditor General Act, the Auditor General may also be asked to undertake special assignments to perform value-for-money audits as requested by the Legislature, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts or a minister of the crown. Generally, results of a special assignment are compiled in a report and submitted to the party that requested it. It's usually up to the requesting party to decide whether the Auditor General's special report will be made public. Again, there may very well be scope for regional impact assessments in these special assignments. Clearly, if one was looking at the question of shelter for women fleeing domestic violence, one would want to know that all over Ontario, there was equitable assignment—in fact, more importantly, adequate assignment—of resources so that women and children are not left in positions where their life and their health are in peril.

Every year, the Auditor General reports on the results of his examination of government resources and administration. The Auditor General's report is tabled by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly in the assembly, usually in the fall, at which time it becomes available to the public. The main body of the annual report consists of matters arising from individual value-for-money audits of ministries and agencies. It includes the audit's significant

findings, observations and recommendations, as well as ministry and agency response to the recommendations. It includes a chapter of follow-up reviews of all the value-for-money audits from the annual report published two years previously.

We, in the NDP, have no problem with specifically mandating the Auditor General to report on regional disparities in his annual report. The only question we would have is whether such specific provisions are needed or whether the current mandate already allows for such assessments. I look forward to hearing commentary from the member as to whether, in fact, that is the case and whether, in fact, the minister responsible for health could now be saying, "I want the Auditor General to be assessing the allocations and telling me whether or not there is an equitable and adequate assessment of resources to these regions."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. David Zimmer: I want to speak to an unintended consequence of this bill if it's passed by this Legislature. Here's the unintended consequence, and I think it's a consequence that none of us, on mature reflection, really want to see come about: a fettering of the independence of the Auditor General.

Why do I say that? When you read the Auditor General Act through, you will see that the whole thing—the premise of the whole thing—is to set up the Auditor General. Like any other auditor, whether it's an auditor in the private sector or other government sectors, that auditor has to be able to independently step into a set of business books or government books or whatever and have the independence to look into the organization and choose, on his or her own initiative, what they're going to audit. That's what the independence of the auditor means.

If we, as legislators, get into the position, even from the best of motives, of directing what the auditor should do—"Auditor, we want you to go there and look at that. We want you to look at that. We don't want you to look at that; we want you to do this"—then we are undermining the whole premise of having an Auditor General keeping an eye on what's going on in our books.

Somebody earlier in the debate—I think that was the member from Toronto-Danforth—said that he didn't think that this legislation was such that if it went through, it would, in any, way explicitly direct the Auditor General. Even the member from Toronto-Danforth recognizes that any explicit direction of the Auditor General to do thus and thus or not do thus and thus is an attack on the Auditor General's independence.

1450

I want to refer to the 2007 report of the Auditor General. This is at page 460 under some comments about the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario:

"Independence: The Auditor General and staff of the office are independent of government and its administration. This independence is an essential safeguard"—an essential safeguard—"that enables the office to fulfill its

auditing and reporting responsibilities objectively and fairly....

"Consequently, the Auditor General maintains an arm's-length—arm's-length—"distance from the government and the political parties in the Legislative Assembly and is thus free to fulfill the office's legislated mandate without political pressure."

So we have a party, a member of this Legislature, introducing a piece of legislation that says, "Auditor, my bill says that you're going to do thus and thus"—an attack on the independence of the auditor. The auditor then goes on to say:

"The office reports on its audits in an annual report to the Legislative Assembly." That's this body. "In addition, the office may make a special report to the assembly at any time on any matter that in the opinion of the Auditor General should not be deferred until the annual report."

Again, what does it stress? The auditor can do whatever he or she likes that, in his opinion, is necessary to do to carry out the function.

"It should be noted that our audit activities include examining the actual administration and execution of the government's policy decisions as carried out by management. However, the office does not comment on the merits of government policy, since the government is held accountable for policy matters by the Legislative Assembly"—that's this body—"which continually monitors and challenges government policies through questions during legislative sessions and through reviews of legislation and expenditure...."

I think if the member who has introduced this bill wants to explore what's going on—or, as she says, what's not going on in her riding, the place to explore it is in this legislative chamber, but do not—do not—interfere with the independence of the Auditor General. Because, in my opinion, if this bill were to see the light of day, to be passed, it's the thin edge of the wedge attacking the Auditor General's independence, and the whole idea that we set this up with was to ensure that independence. This is an attack on that independence.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to join the debate today and support my colleague the member from York-Simcoe on her legislation. I commend the member for bringing forward this legislation, because it's a bill that deals with fairness for all residents of the province of Ontario.

Fairness when allocating funds for health care and social services is an issue that has real impact for families in Dufferin-Caledon and in all high-growth communities across the province. The population in Dufferin-Caledon has exploded over the last 30 years, yet health and social services funding has not increased to match that growth. As a result, social services and health care providers have become increasingly stretched to accommodate these growing numbers. With each passing year, the situation becomes more critical. Dufferin-Caledon and Peel residents are waiting too long to receive important services.

In the last five years, per capita funding in the GTA, 905 and Dufferin county has increased by 1%, and each year the region grows by 100,000 people, roughly the size of the city of Kingston. Each year, the funding gap grows. For hospitals in the Central West LHIN, the per resident funding cap is \$285 below the provincial average. As a result, the gap in annual operating funding for Headwaters Health Care Centre and William Osler Health Care Centre stands at \$164 million below the provincial average. In fact, the Central West LHIN is the lowest-funded LHIN, per resident, in Ontario. This translates into longer waiting lists in emergency rooms, longer waiting lists for mental health, longer waiting lists for CCAC supports and fewer assisted living resources.

Without a commitment to correct this inequity, the funding gap will only increase: By 2009-10 the per resident funding gap will be \$376 below the provincial average, and the annual operating funding gap for the hospitals will be \$222 million below the provincial average.

For social services, the numbers are even worse: a \$708 per capita funding gap; children waiting six to eight months for mental health services; \$50 per capita for developmental services compared to double that outside the GTA.

My local municipal councils are so alarmed with the current situation that they have passed resolutions calling on the government to act.

During the election the Liberals made a commitment to address the funding gap: \$100 million in growth funding for hospitals in our fastest-growing communities. Minister Smitherman has also promised to fix this situation by allocating funding to the province's 14 LHINs, based on population.

My colleague's legislation will hold your government accountable for your promises, and ensure the residents of Dufferin-Caledon get their fair share of funding for health and social services. I commend the member for York-Simcoe for bringing forward legislation to ensure fairness for all in health and social services, and I fully support its passage.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I am really pleased to enter into this debate, as I'm sure all members who represent high-growth areas of the province will be following this conversation that we're having this afternoon. I'd like to particularly commend the member for York-Simcoe, my neighbour, for bringing this to the attention of not only this Legislature but the public.

Certainly, the growth in York region has been simply amazing—incredible growth. I know that when I started as the medical officer of health for York region in 1988, the population was some 450,000. The previous 20 years had seen the population of York region triple. Since then, of course, it has, as the member for York-Simcoe told us, continued in a very dramatic fashion so that now York region has an estimated population of some one million.

We do know that in the early 1990s we were in a recessionary situation and, clearly, growth funding was simply unavailable. However, we do know that during the previous government, the Conservative government, even high-growth areas did see cuts to, in particular, health care funding. As an example, Southlake Regional Health Centre, in the riding of Newmarket–Aurora, had their budget cut by over a million dollars at one point—very unfortunate.

However, we're here to talk about the situation now. I would like to say to the member for Dufferin–Caledon that she has given a good overview of our commitment to growth funding in the future. I am happy to say that at least we are seeing some redressing of this type of imbalance in terms of funding for these very necessary services.

In particular, I was delighted to see the type of funding that Markham Stouffville Hospital recently received, the general surgery wait-times allocation announced a couple of weeks ago, which saw Markham Stouffville Hospital receive \$879,000 for some 760 additional surgeries—progress there.

When it comes to transit infrastructure, other infrastructure projects, we have been investing very successfully in York region. The member for York–Simcoe will recall the \$6.6-million investment in terms of the repairs necessary along Canal Road and in the Holland Marsh to the township of King, a municipality that we both share within our ridings.

We're making progress. There's a lot more to do. Our government and, I'm sure, all members of this House are bringing these issues forward in every way they can.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Frank Klees: I'm pleased to support my colleague on this bill. The reason is very clear why the honourable member believes it's important for the Auditor General to become involved and to have the permissive legislation in place that allows the Auditor General to, in fact, provide his opinion with regard to the equitableness, the fairness of the funding that's taking place. This is permissive legislation, contrary to what the member from Willowdale attempted to articulate about dictating to the Auditor General what he should be doing. That is not the case at all. It is simply providing the framework within which the Auditor General may choose to provide that kind of information to the government.

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It's interesting; Another officer of this Legislature, the Ombudsman, had this to say about his mandate: "My office is open to all—or at least I would like it to be. Unfortunately, at present, thousands of Ontarians who have serious problems with provincially funded services are barred from bringing their concerns to my office. This is because these critical services are deemed outside of our jurisdiction—I'm referring to services that fall within the so-called MUSH sector: municipalities, universities, school boards, hospitals and long-term-care facilities, as well as police and children's aid societies."

What the Ombudsman is calling for is a broader mandate so that he in fact can investigate, that he in fact has the permissive legislation in place to allow him to report to the Legislature on these important matters.

I'm surprised that the member from Oak Ridges–Markham would stand in this place and talk about investing successfully on the part of her government in York region. This is the same York region that is underfunded to the tune of some \$290 million each year, compared to other regions across Ontario, with regard to hospital funding. When compared to 14 other designated health care regions in the province, we are the fourth-lowest funded for home care services, the fourth-lowest funded for mental health services, the lowest-funded for addiction services, the third-lowest funded for long-term-care residential services for our seniors. If the member from Oak Ridges stands in her place and tells this Legislature and, through her speech today, her constituents that she is satisfied with the fairness of funding for health care services and social services, I suggest that she is not doing her job.

For someone who is the former medical officer of health for the region of York to stand and to defend her colleague, who argued a very technical point about the so-called thin edge—the thin edge that we're talking about is the thin edge of finally getting to the point of equitable funding and fairness in funding and allowing an objective third party officer of this Legislature to bring the government to bear, because certainly the government is not listening to members of this Legislature. Not only are they not listening to members of the opposition who represent people in these regions, these high-growth regions, where there is gross underfunding of these important services, they're not listening to their own members. Worse so, their own members, on the government side, are falling in line with the government's position that propagates this kind of inequity and unfairness.

I believe that at this point in time as our constituents in York region and other high growth areas in the province are watching this debate, they will question what their representatives are doing in this place, if not to defend their right to fair and equitable funding when it comes to health care and to social services.

I commend my colleague for having brought this important legislation forward. We want to know that at some point an officer of this Legislature will be able to do what individual MPPs, elected members, cannot do because of the unwillingness of this government to listen to them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm delighted to rise and speak on private member's Bill 110. I'd like to talk a little bit about the substance of the bill.

At the moment, the Auditor General already has the authority, if he wishes—or she, as the case may be in the future—to examine the finances of any particular program. Typically, the piece that the public is most aware

of is his annual report, where he looks at individual programs and says, "Is the government getting value for money? Is money being effectively and efficiently spent on this program?" Having been on public accounts for a number of years and having looked at some of these reports, I can think of a number where the Auditor General already has looked at the regional distribution of money in one way or another.

I think of the auditor's 2003 report, where he was looking at funding for autism programs and noted that there was a huge difference from region to region in how much it cost per child to deliver this service and actually drew out those regional differences. As a result of the work the auditor did—and quite frankly that the public accounts committee did on follow-up—what we saw happening was that regions that had costs that were out of line brought them in line with the provincial average and a lot more children received services because of that. So already there was that sort of regional difference that the auditor wrote about in that report.

Another example played out a bit differently. We were looking at a review of Ministry of Transportation snowplowing contracts. One of the things in snowplowing contracts is performance standards. The performance standards are in fact quite different as you move from region to region, based on genuine regional differences—the weather isn't the same all over the province, the style of roads isn't the same, traffic volumes aren't the same—so there are different performance standards, quite legitimately. The committee looked at those differences and said, "Yes, we get that. The issue is, is each regional contractor being held to the standard they agreed to achieve?"

The other thing is that the Auditor General's job is to review programs and look at whether they are delivering the government policy, and quite often it is government policy to legitimately have differences. I think of the two York region school boards—we seem to be talking about York region. They actually get fewer dollars per student than, say, school boards in northern Ontario. But that's because the government recognizes that, given the dispersion of students, it actually costs more to deliver effective education in Ontario's north. It's deliberate government policy and good policy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: It's a pleasure to stand and support this bill, brought in by our member, who is also in a very rapidly growing area. Milton, the town in which I live and one of three towns I represent, is the fastest-growing town in Canada, let alone Ontario. From 2001, it has grown by approximately 35,000 people, and by 2016 it will have grown to 121,000 people, a 70% increase over 17 years.

Government funding is so often based on census information. As you realize, a census only takes place once every 10 years, so the funding that a rapidly growing community receives—especially the fastest-growing community in Canada—is quite often out of date before

the census information is even released, and it struggles for the next 10 years trying to catch up, being funded at a very low level. We're currently going through that difficulty with our hospitals in both Oakville—another extremely fast-growing community, as is Burlington. Burlington is going through problems with their hospitals being overcrowded and underbuilt for the population they are now trying to serve. The Milton hospital is particularly unique in that it was designed for a population of 30,000 people; we currently have about 70,000 people in Milton. It probably takes six years or more to build a hospital. By 2015, if Milton continues its growth as it is, that hospital will be serving a population of well over 100,000 people, and it will be servicing it with a hospital that was built and designed to service 30,000 people. That makes for a very unfair situation.

1510

So many provincial programs are funded on a census basis. Milton and Oakville are significantly underfunded by those programs. The system that is in place serves Ontario fairly well in 90% of the cases. We're talking here about 10% of the cases where it is inherently unfair to the people who are affected by that: those people who are in fast-growing areas. It's doubly hurtful when those people in rapid-growing areas are being forced into that rate of growth by the government of the day at Queen's Park, who, through their Places to Grow legislation, passed legislation to force certain communities across Ontario to be designated growth areas; Milton, Oakville and Burlington being three of them. So although we're being underfunded by the provincial government, it was the provincial government itself that forced us into that level of growth.

I appreciate Julia bringing this forward. It's a well-needed piece of legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate? Seeing none, the honourable member from York-Simcoe, Mrs. Munro, has up to two minutes for her response.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I appreciate the comments made by the members from Toronto-Danforth, Willowdale, Oak Ridges-Markham, Halton, Guelph and Newmarket-Aurora. I'm going to deal with these comments in a general way, because they are the ones that actually deal with the issue, which is the question of equitable funding—and the ones that want to nitpick on the issue of the Auditor General.

I want to begin with the Auditor General. In my comments, I was very clear. I said that my suggestion is to include the Auditor General in the discussion. Further down in my remarks, I said "clause (12)"; that means there were 11 ahead of it. And those 11 outline a general discussion of areas the auditor may use to conduct his work. So this is merely adding to that, as simply one more. That's why it's called clause (12). So there is no suggestion that somehow—as the member from Willowdale talked about, unintended consequences. This would give him a list of 12 items instead of 11 to consider. I also was very clear when I said that it would not require

him to do so. In fact, I suggest that people would be willing to trust his judgment on these issues.

The other members who spoke dealt with a very real issue, the motive behind this private member's bill, and that is the continuing lack of equity. When how much you receive boils down to which side of the street you live on, then it's high time that members of this House begin to recognize the importance of fairness. I used the example of which side of Steeles Avenue you live on, which is true, but you can also use other areas and look at that inequity between one side of the street and the other.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): This ballot item will be voted on in 50 minutes.

Orders of the day.

SAFER COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LA SÉCURITÉ ACCRUE DES COLLECTIVITÉS ET DES QUARTIERS

Mr. Naqvi moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 106, An Act to provide for safer communities and neighbourhoods / Projet de loi 106, Loi visant à accroître la sécurité des collectivités et des quartiers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order 98, Mr. Naqvi, you have up to 12 minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak on Bill 106, Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. This bill is a result of a shared vision, a vision that is shared by all our communities, and my community of Ottawa Centre, and that is to create a safer community, a community that is healthy and vibrant for all of us to live in.

The idea for this legislation very much comes from my community. I am merely acting at their behest to ensure that we create the tools necessary to create vibrant and safer communities. I want to take the time to recognize some of those community members who have worked extremely hard over the years to make sure that this idea gets to the day that it is being debated in this Legislature. They have been a true inspiration to me and a motivation in the advocacy that I learned about SCAN, which is short for this particular bill. I want to mention Cheryl Parrott, Stephanie Strudwick, Pam Connolly, Wayne Rodney, Nancy Worsfold and Michael Justinich. These are just a few people who have worked very hard in advocating and championing the cause of this particular legislation.

I also at this moment would like to thank my staff, Jackie Choquette, Tanya Dubar, Jamie Murphy and Stacey Shaw, for their sage advice and hard work over the year I have worked on this legislation.

I want to recognize some friends from ACTO, Advocacy Centre for Tenants of Ontario, who are with us, who have shown some concerns about this legislation. I welcome the opportunity to speak with them again to make

sure that we can meet the mutual aim of creating safer communities and neighbourhoods, something which we all share as a responsibility toward our communities. And I welcome members of my community at home in Ottawa Centre, who may be watching these deliberations today, for giving me the opportunity to be their voice in this Legislature.

Let me talk first of all about SCAN, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, and what this legislation stands for. This legislation literally stands for what it says. It is to create a safe community, it is to create a safe neighbourhood. The idea is simple. The idea behind this legislation is to rehabilitate properties in our communities that are being used for illegal activities. It is to ensure that we shut down illegal operations or illegal activities that may be taking place in our neighbourhoods in residential properties or in business properties, so that those properties are used for their intended use—that is, for people either to live or conduct business in. The purpose of these properties is not for someone to use them as a crack house or a booze can or a marijuana grow op, which has a tremendously negative impact on our communities. It jeopardizes our families; it threatens our children.

This legislation, if passed, gives municipalities the additional tools necessary to stop the illegal use of those properties. There is explicitly embedded in this legislation a very strict legal test that must be met for this legislation to apply. This is not some sort of vigilante-type legislation. There is a very clear and distinct legal test which must be met, and there are two conditions that must be met in order for this act to apply. Number one is that a property is being habitually used for a specified illegal activity, and by “habitually,” we mean that it is being used on a regular or recurring basis. We’re not talking about a circumstance of just a one-off instance; but that this property on a regular or routine basis is being used for an illegal activity. Those specified illegal activities are listed in the legislation. We’re talking about things like use of a property as a crack house, a brothel, a booze can, a marijuana grow op or storage for firearms. That’s not the intended purpose of those properties. So that’s test number one, that’s question number one that has to be met in order for this legislation to apply.

1520

The second aspect of the test is that that particular use is having an adverse effect on the community or neighbourhood. What do I mean by “adverse effect”? That it is negatively impacting the safety, the security or health of the neighbourhood, of the community, or the people who live in that neighbourhood or community.

Both of these strict tests—there has to be explicit evidence presented by the complainant in order for this legislation to be applicable. The best way to achieve that is by creating a partnership, of course. This legislation works in its most optimum form if landlords and owners, tenants if tenants are involved, neighbours, community associations and police are working together to meet the objective of the legislation.

This SCAN legislation has been tabled in this House. This is not the first time that this legislation is being implemented. The legislation has been enforced in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, Alberta and in the territory of Yukon. Over the past year I have done extensive consultation, reviewed that other legislation and verified the case law to see how those pieces of legislation have been implemented. What I wanted to do was to create a piece of legislation, a SCAN legislation, that is made in Ontario and meets the realities of Ontario to ensure that it is actually truly effective.

There are three unique features of Bill 106, as tabled in this Legislature, from other provinces' legislation:

(1) In order to have an effective implementation of this legislation, the enforcement of this legislation, if passed, takes place at the local level, in the community. Hence, there is a clause relating to municipal opting. It is up to our municipalities to decide whether they want SCAN to be implemented in their community. It gives them that additional tool they need to ensure that problem properties can be addressed.

(2) In this legislation, Bill 106, there is a whole informal process which has been codified, written down in this legislation, which means that the best way to resolve any problem if the test is met, the one I mentioned earlier, is by consulting, by using the informal process. We don't want to run to the courts right away. We want to make sure that members of the community—the community associations, law enforcement, the owners, the residents—are all involved to find an informal process. We felt it to be necessary that that process be codified in the legislation, in the bill.

(3) It requires, it mandates, that the director of SCAN, the person responsible to implement this legislation, consult the relevant bodies, and there is mandatory language in that regard.

As I see my time ticking away, I want to talk about some of the criticism that has been raised about this legislation. Let me address one point in an absolute manner. This legislation is not about evicting tenants. That is not the purpose of this legislation. It is about protecting the rights of tenants. This legislation is to ensure that that one single mother I met, who was trying to raise her five-year-old daughter, living next to a crack house, has a voice, that she deserves the right to live in a safe community. A property should not be used for a crack house. A property should be used for people to live in. That is what we are trying to achieve through this legislation.

In addition, there are several provisions in this legislation which ensure due process. Only a court of law, the Superior Court of Justice, in our province can decide if an order can be made through this legislation, not the director of SCAN. That individual or that entity is only responsible to carry out the investigation, and they're accountable to the municipalities as to their responsibilities in the legislation.

There are notice requirements in this legislation that notice shall be given to the residents, that they should have a

say if an order is being sought at the Superior Court of Justice, that any undue hardship that may be caused to them should also be heard. And the idea is simple, that we want to make sure that people's rights are protected. Nobody is interested in tabling legislation which might be held to be unconstitutional, and myself being a lawyer, I'm definitely not interested in that prospect. There are provisions as to the rights of residents, if their rights have been impacted somehow, to bring in motions to vary the order.

But let me go back and share with you the experience I have learned from various community members across the province. The problem is when we are dealing with problem properties—not that anybody lives there—a property which is being used for illegal activity. The purpose behind this legislation is to shut down that illegal operation, that illegal activity so that people who need to live in those vulnerable communities, those at-risk communities, have a place to live safely, in a healthy environment, to make sure that their children are growing in a safer community.

Therefore, I ask all the members of this Legislature to please support this legislation. A package has been provided to all of you in terms of the support I have received for this legislation from across the province, and I look forward to your comments and will do my utmost to respond to the concerns you may have.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm very pleased today to rise and speak on Bill 106, the member from Ottawa Centre's initial private member's bill in this House, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, 2008.

There are a couple of things I wanted to mention. I usually stand up when we speak in private members' time, because a lot of good legislation that either the government has passed or is passed by private members' bills comes from this time. We've heard some good debate today on a couple of other resolutions and bills, and I give the member credit for bringing something like this forward.

Just this week, we've seen the government introduce the legislation on not using cellphones in cars, and I give full credit to my colleague the member from Durham, John O'Toole, who brought that bill up a number of times. I give him a lot of credit; in fact, I'll say that John O'Toole is responsible for the cellphone bill. There will be lots of issues around that with committees etc., so we'll have to see where that goes. But we've seen it in a number of cases with private members' time.

I also want to put on the record that I am disappointed that we've had to move private members' time to a Thursday afternoon, because a lot of people do leave the Legislature. They're on their way home or going back to their ridings. I would have liked to see it remain on Thursday mornings, because I think there was a lot more interest in it. I hope that people will all revisit this thing at later dates because I think, as we have seen here today, there has been some absolutely great legislation out there or great thoughts and good debate on it.

I haven't had a lot of time to review this bill, but I will say that the member has provided a lot of background information on it, and it's a fairly detailed bill, and he has got support on it.

First of all, I wanted to put on the record the support that he received from the Federation of Rental-housing Providers of Ontario. And I think many of us know Mike Chopowick, who sent this letter, but I wanted to put it on the record because I think Mike has some good points in it. It says:

"On behalf of the Federation of Rental-housing Providers of Ontario, I am writing to request your support for Bill 106, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, as introduced by Mr. Yasir Naqvi, MPP, Ottawa Centre.

"The purpose of the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act is to enhance community safety by targeting properties that are used for illegal activities. SCAN legislation is used successfully in other provinces such as Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia, and is being implemented in Newfoundland and Alberta.

"The provisions contained in Bill 106 provide a mechanism to deal with properties that are habitually used for specified illegal activities that negatively impact the health, safety and security of surrounding neighbourhoods. The proposed law offers an innovative way to protect tenants and homeowners from entrenched illegal drug or alcohol activity, prostitution or illegal gun possession conducted in residential properties.

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"This bill fosters a partnership between municipalities, neighbours, tenants, police and ratepayer associations to make our neighbourhoods safe. Importantly, this proposed law provides tools that currently are not available under the current legislative framework overseeing residential tenancies in Ontario.

"When criminal activity gains a foothold in a community, be it a household or apartment building, it is the families and other law-abiding residents and tenants who are the innocent victims. Bill 106, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, applies techniques successfully implemented in other Canadian provinces to protect their neighbourhoods from crime.

"In summary, as providers of housing for over 250,000 households across Ontario, our members support the efforts of law enforcement agencies, ratepayer groups, tenants and community safety organizations to address ongoing criminal activity through the implementation of SCAN legislation. We ask for your support when this proposed legislation receives second reading on October 29, and we'd be pleased to meet with you to discuss at a further time."

I wanted to put that on the record because I understand they had some good points on that and I thought it was clear as well. He has received a number of supports from some of the media outlets, and although he has received this support, they are saying that the bill should be a government bill. I'll just read a couple of sentences out of the one in August: "Liberal MPP Yasir Naqvi deserves

support in his efforts to make it easier to get violent, drug-dealing, troublemaking tenants evicted from public and private housing.

"The only sour note is that Naqvi is working alone. The Ottawa Centre MPP plans to introduce SCAN (Safer Community and Neighbourhood) legislation as a private member's bill in the Ontario Legislature this fall.

"But to have any real hope of success, it should be a government bill."

I can read these kinds of things forever, but the reality is that the government may—if this bill becomes popular and it does ever get to committee hearings after second reading, then there would be a real opportunity there for the government to adopt some of this. We do have some concerns and questions with it, though.

I do know that he has support from a number of organizations, but there were a couple that I thought were missing, and maybe in the summary or later on, he could add them. The Association of Municipalities of Ontario, AMO, is of course our big one. I'm curious what added costs there may be to the municipalities when you hire a director and his staff, and you implement this legislation. So I'm curious about AMO's position in support of this and what they in fact would do and how they would see the municipalities paying for this and what the cost would be. In these difficult economic times, we have to be cognizant of the costs associated with governing any of our municipalities. This is another burden on the taxpayer and I'd like to know, as we work through it, what kinds of costs we'd actually see here, and if, in fact, there's any thought that the provincial government would be providing any of the support for the municipalities.

Under law enforcement, which is my critic's portfolio as critic for community safety and correctional services, I know that the Ontario Association of Police Services Boards has supported it, the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, the Ottawa Police Services Board and the city of Kawartha Lakes. What I have seen absent in the letters of support—and maybe he can add this later on, or we can see that support a little later on—is the support of the Police Association of Ontario, the Ontario Provincial Police Association and maybe the Canadian Police Association.

We have over 30,000—I think there are 33,000 officers, and I noticed that they're not supporting this at this point. I'm not saying they're against the bill, but I don't see it as an area of support. I'm curious how they feel about this particular bill and I would really look forward to their endorsement and/or their comments on it. They'll be having a lobby day here. I believe it's coming up on November 18. This would be a good question to ask any of the representatives of the Police Association of Ontario: how they feel about Bill 106 and what their comments would be if, in fact, the member from Ottawa Centre gets to move this bill forward into committee hearings, because I think we definitely do need that support.

There are a couple of other questions I wanted to—we had our researchers work with the legislation, and there

were a number of questions that I think we should put on the record for the member and for our caucus as well. These are the kinds of questions we hope to get answered in the future.

First of all, how does the bill compare with legislation approved in other provinces? For example, how many provinces put the director under municipal jurisdiction?

Second, most of the complaints listed under the definition of "specified purpose" are covered by criminal and tort law. The probability of guilt is much lower pursuant to subsection 10(1) than some of the standards for some of the specified purposes.

Third, is this not a matter that should be, and is, dealt with by police? Is this more bureaucracy in the wrong office? We hope we could utilize the staff we have in these areas; we don't want to create another level of bureaucracy. I think our party would be quite opposed to that part of it.

Fourth, if people are not complaining to police, why will they complain to this new director?

Fifth, does this bill apply to private, single dwellings? If so, does subsection 10(4) mean that a community safety order can force a person to leave their home on the probability of guilt set down in subsection 10(1)?

Sixth, taking into account section 18, if a community safety order forces the evacuation of a property, where will those individuals not involved in the specified purposes go?

Seventh, what justifies forcing a non-participating party to leave their home—for example, in a closed apartment building—and then making a motion pursuant to section 15?

Eighth, it is assumed that a peace officer is a member of the provincial police—section 40 provides for their assistance. Will the government be providing adequate support to ensure that the police have the resources to attend to these new duties?

Finally, will municipalities have to pay for the director and his or her office? This is something I brought up earlier.

I think people will support the bill overall at second reading today; I have no problem with that myself. However, I do think that when we go to committee, if the bill is fortunate enough to go to committee—I wish him well if the bill does get to committee—will these kinds of questions be answered?

In summary, I want to say that obviously we support anything to do with law and order and community safety. We support Block Parent programs; we support all the different programs that are out there—Crime Stoppers in Simcoe county, for example, have their 10th anniversary coming up in the next few weeks. These are all positive things for our communities, but at the same time we have to really recognize, particularly in these difficult economic times, what costs will be associated with it and what the impact will be on municipalities—individual municipalities in particular. I wish him well as we move forward with this.

Just summarizing some of the things I mentioned earlier, it's difficult—I want to say again that I'm opposed to private members' hour being held late on Thursday afternoon. I think it was a bad mistake when the government brought that forward. I'd love to see this thing—even if we started at 9 o'clock on Thursday morning and had private members' hour at that time, I think it would be really positive. It would be good for the members and good for the backbenchers who don't have an opportunity to participate in question period. We have seen over many, many years that there are a lot of good thoughts and good ideas that come from the private members' time we have here at Queen's Park, as we saw just this week, when the government introduced a cellphone bill that was directly a result of Mr. O'Toole's efforts.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: We in the New Democratic Party could not be more opposed to Bill 106. I have to grant the member from Ottawa Centre some moxie, though, for introducing the members of Advocacy Centre for Tenants, because they're here to protest Bill 106, as is virtually every tenants' organization across Ontario. But welcome, Yutaka Dirks, Tracy Heffernan, Katherine Haist and Jill Houlihan.

I'm the housing critic who brought forward the bill on housing as a human right, which is in line with the United Nations call on all of us to make housing a human right. Not only does this bill fly in the face of that sentiment; it flies in the face of due process. It may even fly in the face of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

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The Advocacy Centre for Tenants—Ontario has listed a few problems. They're not alone. So has the Federation of Metro Tenants' Associations, south Etobicoke tenants, Housing Help, North Peel and Dufferin Community Legal Services, Parkdale legal services; just about every legal clinic you can mention is opposed to this. Eastern Region Housing Study Group, Homelessness and Housing Umbrella Group, PDRC, Cambridge Action on Homelessness Group, Waterloo region—I could go on. Virtually every tenants' group is opposed to this.

I heard that this was supposed to be a bill on behalf of tenants' rights. Well, it's very interesting, then, that tenants are opposed to it and that the bodies in favour of it are landowners. It's interesting that this has kind of a one-way thrust to it. That is to say that, if your landlord happens to be running a crack den and you're living in the basement, it doesn't work for you.

In terms of due process, I'll just go over some of these in a little bit better detail. The member from Simcoe North is absolutely right: There's about a million-dollar price tag to this, not to mention bureaucracy, and it would be a price tag associated with municipalities. So I think maybe AMO hasn't read the fine print of this bill, because I don't know who is going to pay for that and the director. But certainly what it does here, and what it's done in Manitoba, is simply to shift the problem, and

what is the problem, really? Partly it's a problem of poverty, partly it's a problem of addiction; i.e., a health problem—from one place to another place. In fact, in the jurisdictions that have enacted SCAN legislation, you will see very clearly that it has not affected the crime rate whatsoever. All it does is move the crack house from one neighbourhood to another, the house of prostitution from one neighbourhood to another.

The bottom line here, members, is that if it's a crack dealer in the house or if it's a house of prostitution, or if it's a marijuana grow op, it's a criminal activity. We don't want to evict them; we want to put them in prison. We want to lock them up. My friends here to the right are supposed to be law-and-order people. I mean, come on, these are criminal activities. You phone the police. If there's criminal activity going on in your house, in your neighbourhood, anywhere, you should be phoning the police and the police will be there. If that's not enough, I think that's a very sad commentary upon the effectiveness and efficiency of our police force. I wouldn't want to make that comment.

I'm going to tell you what we're doing as an initiative in Parkdale—High Park that works really, really well, and we don't have to go into draconian legislation like Bill 106. We have what's called a problem properties task force. It's very successful. It's the local councillors working with the police force. If there's a problem property, and we've had our share in Parkdale, it's identified. They sit down. You can bring in municipal building inspectors; they're usually the first line of defence. You can look at the property. You can bring in the police. You can order raids on properties. You can do all sorts of things while still coming under the umbrella of the law because, really, at its heart what Bill 106 does is question the efficacy of the criminal justice system such as it is, apart from egregiously overriding the rights of tenants.

What would the NDP do to make our community safer? First of all I've given an example of something that works at the local level and it works extremely well. You could talk to landlords or tenants in our riding, and nobody would have a problem with the problem properties task force.

Otherwise, what do you do about the problem of addiction? There's a question. First of all, what you do is you have more beds for rehabilitation, for detox—something that this government hasn't put money in for a long, long time—that's what you do about the problem of addiction.

What do you do about the problem of poverty? First of all you have a living wage, at least \$10.25 an hour, indexed to inflation. The other thing is you have housing, hence my bill making housing a human right. If you had adequate supportive housing for people with mental health and addiction issues, you probably wouldn't have as many problems as you do now. So guaranteed affordable housing is absolutely essential. We need real rent controls. We don't have them in this province. Instead, what we have is unit rent controls. So really what we hear now, and what we're seeing, with gentrification across the province, are landlords who want to get rid of

people who are paying low rent. This gives them a vehicle for doing that. Then what they do is, they slap on a coat of paint, they tart up the foyer, and they jack up the rents. We've seen this over and over again. This gives them the umbrella under which to do it.

This director that is proposed here is really draconian. You are putting one person, a process instead of the criminal justice system, instead of due process. We would absolutely disagree with not only the level of bureaucracy that this creates, the cost to the municipalities, but the fact that this isn't really fair to both tenants and landlords, I would argue, and could be challenged and I think would be challenged or should be challenged under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The other aspect of this, and we've seen it in my own riding, is that you get children and women caught up in this. We have an epidemic of homelessness in this province. Why aren't we looking at that? Why aren't we looking at 5,000 people who are living on the streets of Toronto, at the deaths that happen and will start to happen every winter in this city? Why aren't we looking at more shelter beds for women fleeing domestic violence and more transitional housing for people? Why don't we look at that? Just because somebody has an addiction issue doesn't necessarily mean they are not married and don't have children. So what you're doing is, you are kicking them out and you are kicking their children out too, and their children end up on the streets and in shelters.

We've seen this time and time again. Either addiction is a health issue or it's not. Either what's going on is a criminal issue or it's not. If it's a health issue, let's put money into the health care system. If it's a criminal issue, let's, for God's sake, phone the police. The member said, well, people would not be protected if they phoned the police. Please. Come on. I've made calls on 911 when I've seen a crime in action. People can make calls on 911. You don't have to give your name. The police have the jurisdiction to go in. If there's crack dealing, if there's prostitution, if there's a marijuana grow-op, they have the jurisdictional right, and they exercise it, to go in and arrest people, which is what should happen.

This is a kind of behind-the-scenes, backdoor approach to what should be a criminal justice issue and what really is—I put this forward—an issue of landlords trying to move tenants out and trying to circumvent tenant rights and the Residential Tenancies Act, which, by the way, has a speeded-up eviction process which landlords could use if they wanted anyway.

So absolutely we're opposed to it. Evidence has shown in the jurisdictions where it has been enforced—and, ultimately, at the end of the day, this is a question about human rights. I would certainly wonder—on a bill like this, Bill 106, which affects tenants so egregiously, I would certainly have expected the member from Ottawa Centre to have consulted with tenants' groups, to have consulted with organized tenants' groups before bringing this forward, because I can tell you, it wouldn't fly.

Let me read an excerpt from Parkdale Community Legal Services. They say, "Bill 106 would create a new

entity within municipalities, operating independently of landlord and tenant law, which could have people evicted by the court and their entire buildings shut down for a period of time because of identified 'community safety' issues. Tenants in the targeted buildings would face the risk of eviction/dislocation and be denied the process of the Residential Tenancies Act. Instead of the summary process of the Landlord and Tenant Board, they would face the daunting and expensive process of the Ontario courts. All at the behest of some appointed municipal director acting on 'community concerns.'"

These are lawyers who actually work with tenants. These are lawyers across the province of Ontario in legal clinics, large and small, that work with tenants day by day.

They also say, "In the broader community, neighbourhood safety is protected and enhanced through proper policing, municipal planning policies, appropriate transportation services and the like. Within an apartment building, the landlord also plays a role to the extent that he/she is in compliance with all municipal safety and maintenance standards and responds quickly to incidents involving tenants that threaten the safety or the enjoyment of the premises by other tenants. The Residential Tenancies Act, for example, provides landlords with the ability"—I mentioned this already—"to 'fast-track' eviction of tenants impairing the safety of others or involved with the production/distribution of illegal drugs."

I know that all MPPs here have dealt with issues like this in their constituency offices. I would certainly hope that we as a Parliament and that you as a government do not move to institute this draconian piece of legislation. I would certainly hope that landlords and tenants—I'm a landlord and I have been a tenant across the province—rise up and speak out for civil rights over this sort of legislation. Certainly, I would hope that any time legislation comes before this House that deals with tenants' rights, the first place any member goes to discuss that piece of legislation that's proposed is to the tenants themselves, to ask them and their organizations—venerable organizations all—about the impact on them. Then we wouldn't have to take up the time of this assembly to do so. Again, how are we voting? Absolutely against. Why are we doing it? Civil rights.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I rise today to support my honourable colleague's bill to provide for safer communities and neighbourhoods. It is clear that this bill is the product of care, compassion and concern for one's community. It is founded on the knowledge that safer communities result in safer municipalities, thereby providing the fundamentals upon which Ontario's communities can prosper. As a result, this legislation is about more than ensuring safe communities. It is based on ensuring that those who have resided in their communities and neighbourhoods for generations are able to maintain their way of life and to provide for a safe and prosperous community for generations to come. It's about attracting

individuals, families and businesses to our communities who are committed to the principles and the spirit of this bill—principles that seek to make Ontario's communities stronger, safer and more prosperous to live in.

It is clear that this legislation would be an investment in communities across this great province, especially based on some of the endorsements that it has already received by many municipalities, many law enforcement boards, associations and community groups throughout Ontario.

I am very proud to stand alongside the great city of Hamilton as a supporter of this legislation. In particular, I would like to recognize and thank a great Hamiltonian and Hamilton city councillor, Bob Bratina, who is here with us today. Councillor Bratina had Hamilton's best interests in mind when he worked with my colleague to develop this legislation. His hard work in gaining the endorsement of this bill by Hamilton city council is a clear sign that Councillor Bratina and all other Hamiltonians recognize the benefit that safe communities and neighbourhoods bring to our city.

One of those benefits is that this legislation fits directly in line with Hamilton's vision to be the best place in Canada to raise a child. For all families, safe communities and neighbourhoods are one of the top priorities when choosing where to raise children. Hamiltonians from all walks of life know that community solutions to community challenges are the key to further progress on safer communities and neighbourhoods. This bill represents just that—working with landowners, landlords and tenants in conjunction with community social services to build healthy neighbourhoods and to make Hamilton a city to which families all across this province and country are drawn.

Not only are families attracted to safe communities and neighbourhoods, but businesses, both large and small, will invest in those communities in which they know their employees are out of harm's way. The strides Hamilton has made in attracting businesses—like Stackpole Automotive parts plant, Vicwest Steel and Burlington Stamping, to mention a few—have been taken because businesses know that Hamilton is committed to having safe communities and safe neighbourhoods. For these reasons, I fully support this bill and I would like to thank my colleague from Ottawa Centre for bringing this important legislation to this House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I want to remind friends across the way what debate we are in right now. This is private members' time. This is a time where members bring new ideas to the floor of this Legislature so we can have a conversation about our role as legislators. Each and every one of us wants to have safe and healthy communities, and each and every one of us wants to examine how we might better be able to provide tools to our communities to make sure those communities are safe.

So I want to acknowledge the work that has been done by my colleague Mr. Naqvi, who has brought forward a

very detailed and thoughtful bill. It's an important debate about how we might reach the best balance to make sure that our communities are safe. We on this side of the House are part of a government that has worked very hard to increase and improve the protections to tenants, and there is no doubt that in the context of this bill moving on to committee and continuing in debate, we would need to find that appropriate balance. I would urge members across the House to take a look at the very detailed language and terminology that is put in the bill to ensure those protections are put in place. If the appropriate balance has not been met, there is certainly an opportunity to continue that debate beyond this forum.

I take the words, for example, of Councillor Paula Fletcher, who represents the Riverdale area, who told the media that any tool that helps the city deal with problem properties is worth a look. Fletcher said she would ask city staff to look at it. That's the approach that I think is imperative as we gather as private members in this House: that we take a good look at legislation, that we see what tools are being used around the country and how we can make sure our communities are safe.

Bill 106 puts in place protections to provide social assistance, social service agencies and community organizations to help those who might be removed from their homes, and provides tenants' relief, ability to vary the order, to appeal the order.

For the thoughtfulness of the bill that has come forward and for his firm commitment to make sure that tenants are protected in the context of making sure our communities are safe for all of us, I congratulate my colleague. I support this bill, and I think we should continue this debate in the months ahead.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I would like to commend the member from Ottawa Centre for widening the debate on an issue that is a cause of concern for many of my constituents, and that is the issue of community safety.

The bill brought forward is a significant step that we can take within the provincial jurisdiction to make our neighbourhoods and communities safer and healthier. Some neighbourhoods are negatively affected by illegal activities all too often, sometimes every day.

This summer, for example, the riding of York South-Weston experienced a series of incidents that have shocked and shaken the community. The residents who live in these pockets of our riding are seriously concerned about witnessing drug deals, prostitution, gang-related violence, even shootings, in their own neighbourhoods. They are frustrated, and they're looking for answers.

Active residents and BIAs are coming forward to reclaim their neighbourhoods. They are asking for a strong community safety approach to be put in place.

Steve Tasses, head of the Eglinton Hill BIA, talking about the area of Eglinton and Keele, where four different shootings have occurred in the last few months, two of them fatal, still has faith in his community: "We look at Keele and Eglinton as a community where we work, where we live." This is still our community.

People like Steve understand what it means to be a good neighbour, and residents such as he are ready to contribute to building stronger and safer communities. Residents often have a local community knowledge which can prove to be a vital resource in combatting criminal activity. SCAN legislation responds to this and engages community involvement.

City councillor Frances Nunziata, who represents part of my riding of York South-Weston and is one of the six councillors who founded the West Toronto Crime Task Force in response to the recent string of criminal activities that have plagued our part of the city, welcomes this kind of engagement and describes it as "a wonderful opportunity to empower citizens to help clean up their communities so that they can be healthy and peaceful places to live in."

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This bill would complement the work of the police, the city, the province and the residents, helping them to get rid of crack houses, gang-related violence, helping law-abiding citizens, regardless of the type of households they live in, to have a healthier, strong and prosperous community. SCAN legislation can be a big part of this. By building a network of related measures that complement one another, we can work together to resolve the problem at multiple levels.

I will be supporting this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Members who represent tenant organizations should know that Bill 106, introduced by the member for Ottawa Centre, will be discussed in committee, and this certainly will not be the end of it. Therefore, any adjustments, abatements, changes, can be made at that level.

As you know, Mr. Speaker—I've mentioned it to you once before, I think—in July, my constituency office received 28 calls about a crack house. My response was, "Did you call the police? Why not? Why don't you call the police on this issue?" They responded to me, "Mr. Ruprecht, the police aren't doing very much." I said, "What do you mean, 'aren't doing very much'? It's against the law, isn't it? Have you seen crack dealings in front of the house, in the house?" "Yes, we witness it all the time. My kids are walking by." Sometimes it takes more than a year to do anything about this and to create peace in the community.

I see this bill and these recommendations that the member for Ottawa Centre has made in a different light. I see it this way: 85% of those owners who own these places are absentee landlords. I don't like absentee landlords. I don't know how many of you like absentee landlords, but where I am, I see many of these absentee landlords doing nothing about it, taking the money in their pocket and not looking after the property. I am upset about this. And what do we do about it? What's the quickest and—maybe not the best; we'll have to look. I listened to the member from Parkdale-High Park very carefully and I agree with some of the stuff she has said. In fact, she makes sense many times in this House. I like

you, personally, for that matter. But the point is, people want action. How do we handle these absentee landlords? One way to do it—and I think my time is almost running out—is to support this bill so that we get into the committee and then we might make some of the changes.

We simply cannot allow that absentee landlords are running these neighbourhoods down, because that is essentially what they are doing. They don't live there. Do they live in the basement? No. Absentee landlords live in some of the big houses, and some of them, I personally know, are multi-millionaires, and they're using tenants and using these houses to make more money. Somehow we've got to stop that. We don't know how necessarily, in the best way, but the member for Ottawa Centre made a good start in terms of coming to grips with this issue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member for Ottawa Centre, Mr. Naqvi, has up to two minutes for his response.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I want to thank the members from Simcoe North, Parkdale–High Park, Hamilton Mountain, Etobicoke–Lakeshore, York South–Weston and Davenport for their insightful comments on Bill 106.

It really saddens me that the NDP's position is that criminals have more rights than law-abiding citizens. It really saddens me that the NDP believes that tenants should have no rights and they should live among crack houses and marijuana grow-ops and brothels. It really saddens me that the NDP's position is contrary to the NDP governments who proposed and legislated this bill in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. It really saddens me that the NDP's position is contrary to my own NDP opponent's in the riding of Ottawa Centre in the past election and the NDP MP Paul Dewar, who fully supports this legislation.

It is our collective responsibility that we make sure that our community is a safe place to live for everyone. We need to ensure—otherwise, we're abrogating our responsibility—that properties in our communities are not being used for illegal activities.

This legislation protects the rights of tenants. If reviewed carefully, you will see that tenants' rights are protected again and again in this legislation. The director of SCAN has no power but to investigate; it's the court which has the power to determine what remedy should be given. That's the gist of this legislation. That is the purpose: that we ensure that our neighbourhoods, our communities, are safe; that our children are roaming around in the streets without any worries, without any concerns, not picking up needles, not picking up condoms or things of their like. I ask all the members to please support Bill 106.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. I ask the members to take their seats. The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

ASSISTANCE TO THE DISABLED

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will first deal with ballot item number 49, standing in the name of

Mr. Arnott. Mr. Arnott has moved private members' notice of motion number 55. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

AUDITOR GENERAL AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LE VÉRIFICATEUR GÉNÉRAL

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will now deal with ballot item number 50, standing in the name of Mrs. Munro. Mrs. Munro has moved second reading of Bill 110, An Act to amend the Auditor General Act. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will now deal with ballot item number 51—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Oh, I'm sorry. Mrs. Munro, where would you like it to go?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'd like it to go to the finance and economic affairs committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it agreed that it goes to the finance and economic affairs committee? So ordered.

SAFER COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LA SÉCURITÉ ACCRUE DES COLLECTIVITÉS ET DES QUARTIERS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We'll now deal with ballot item number 51, standing in the name of Mr. Naqvi. Mr. Naqvi has moved second reading of Bill 106, An Act to provide for safer communities and neighbourhoods. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? So carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Naqvi?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I ask that Bill 106 be referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it agreed that the bill be referred to committee? So ordered.

Orders of the day.

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until next Monday, November 3, at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1607.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

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Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
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Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (LIB)	London West / London-Ouest	Attorney General / Procureur général
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
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Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
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Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
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		Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
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		Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
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Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
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		Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
		Minister of Revenue / Ministre du Revenu

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
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Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby—Oshawa	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
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Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
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Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora—Rainy River	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
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Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges—Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (LIB)	Brampton—Springdale	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	
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Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean—Carleton	
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O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	

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Ramsay, David (LIB)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland—Quinte West	
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Ruprecht, Tony (LIB)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
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Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
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Sorbara, Greg (LIB)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton—Mississippi Mills	
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Van Bommel, Maria (LIB)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	
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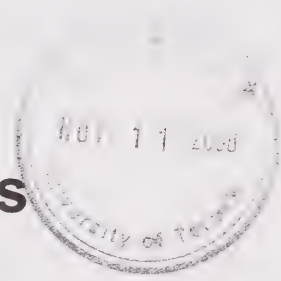
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**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Première session, 39^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**



Monday 3 November 2008

Lundi 3 novembre 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 3 November 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 3 novembre 2008

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Charles Sousa: I'd like to welcome in our east gallery today Messieurs Dave Cook and Terrence Butt, both former Mississauga city councillors.

Please join me in congratulating Mr. Cook on his newest book, *Fading History*. It's a collection of 15 stories about Mississauga's history. This is Mr. Cook's third book about the history of Mississauga. Others include *Apple Blossom and Satellite Dishes*, a history of Applewood; and *From Frozen Ponds to Beehive Glory*, a history of Dixie Arena and Beehive hockey club.

I'd also provide thanks to Mr. Butt for helping to finance its publication. Congratulations.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I'd like to introduce to the Legislature my brother Peter, who is in the members' east gallery. Peter is the clinical director for the Brain Injury Services of Northern Ontario. And as you'll be able to tell, he's my younger, slimmer, better-looking brother. Peter, welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We have with us today in the Speaker's gallery David Warner, former Speaker and MPP for Scarborough-Ellesmere; his wife, Pat Warner; his grandson Sebastian Smith and Sebastian's friend Connor Gedney. Please join me in welcoming our guests. Welcome back, Mr. Speaker.

ORAL QUESTIONS

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services and it has to do with his role as an advocate for small business in his government and especially within cabinet. On October 9, in the *Toronto Star*, Premier McGuinty was quoted as saying, "The worst thing you could do in an economic slowdown is raise taxes." Minister, why then are you not opposing the bill introduced last week by the Minister of Labour that will force small construction

companies in Ontario to pay an additional \$11,000 a year?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Actually, I am very proud of some of the things that we have done for our small business.

Let me tell you, it basically fits in four very neat categories. One is that we have been able to lower taxes and another is that we have, in a very systematic way, actually saved money to small businesses. We also have programs that are actually quite in line with what the small businesses are looking for.

I am delighted that last month was Salute to Small Businesses Month, and I had the chance to go and visit so many small businesses. I want to tell the member opposite that our small businesses are actually thriving, and they're doing quite well in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I listened very closely for an answer there, but I didn't detect one, and that is indeed shameful. They announced this new tax during Small Business Week, doubling the insult to small business and really reflecting on the inability of this particular minister to represent them in the cabinet of the government. You can call it what you want, Minister, but Ontarians know what a tax is. They have learned there hasn't been a Liberal tax that didn't come with a broken promise attached to it. Now, by introducing this new tax during an economic decline, your government has dealt small businesses in the construction industry, and perhaps for many, the final blow. Minister, is this how the Liberals celebrate Small Business Week in Ontario: with a death march?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Maybe I need to tell the member—although he voted against it, maybe he still needs to hear about this—that we have actually decreased the taxes on small businesses to the tune of about \$750 million in 2007 and 2008. We have also eliminated the capital tax on the small businesses, actually dating back a year, and they are already receiving the refunds on that as well. But, in addition to that, we have also reduced the business taxes on small businesses.

We also have programs that are really very beneficial to small businesses that will make them more competitive and more productive in the marketplace at this point in time, so I'm very proud of what our government has done for small business.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I sincerely hope that business people across the province are watching and listen-

ing to the responses from this minister. I've asked him specifically about a bill that is going to negatively impact on hundreds and hundreds of small businesses across this province. One owner has described it as another nail in the coffin for small companies already working 12 to 14 hours a day trying to keep the bills paid in an economic slowdown. Minister, here you are not answering their questions or their concerns.

The province has seen the loss of 230,000 manufacturing jobs and another 250,000 predicted to disappear. Why are you standing by doing nothing while the Minister of Labour is apparently deliberately killing off opportunities for our people who are going to lose their jobs? These are opportunities in small businesses. Why are you standing by and not even answering questions?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: It's one thing to ask questions in the House and another to actually do something concrete for small businesses. We have systematically reduced red tape on small businesses, we have reduced the paperwork for small businesses, and the measure that the Minister of Labour has taken is to even the playing field for everybody so that the people can be treated right.

Just talking about cutting the red tape: In seven key ministries, we have reduced, in the first phase, 24% of the paperwork burden. In the second eight ministries, we reduced it by another 25%, and we are moving ahead to reduce it in the remaining ministries by another 25%. But we are also moving ahead to automate most of the paperwork that the small businesses have to fill. We are also working closely with the federal government to coordinate the filing of the tax system for the small—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

1040

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Robert Bailey: My question is to the Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services.

The recent answers just show the absolute lunacy behind this new WSIB bill. This bill is not about tackling the underground economy, because during a slowdown, new taxes only drive businesses further underground. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has said as much. Minister, if it's not about the underground economy, then whose interest does this bill serve? Which backroom election promise is your government fulfilling with this bill?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I want to tell the member opposite that I meet with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business on a regular basis, and they are very supportive of the steps that we have taken to support the small business industry in this province. One of the representatives of the CFIB actually sits on our small business agency, so they have input on the kinds of things that we do for small business.

But what I really want to talk about is some of the things that we are actually doing for small business. As I indicated before, we have systematically reduced paper-

work for small business. We have programs dedicated to small businesses so that they can be successful in the work that they do, and I will be able to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's important for Ontarians to know what is behind this government's agenda. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business, whose some 43,000 members supply over 50% of Ontario jobs, don't want this bill. They've told us that. They've said this bill does nothing to stop the very underground economy that they are competing against. They have presented upwards of 25,000 objections from their members, who have said that the \$11,000 annual WSIB tax is going to put them out of business—shut them down, period. Minister, why aren't you out there doing your job, fighting for the very survival of these small businesses?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I understand that the member from Sarnia-Lambton actually had a very good relationship with Doug Chalmers, the director of Aluma Systems and the former chair of the Sarnia Construction Association. This is what Mr. Chalmers said about this: "Congratulations. Absolutely brilliant. This will make Ontario a safer workplace and improve the quality of life for all of us." This is a friend of the member from Sarnia. I am sure if you are not going to take my advice, then you will take his advice and listen to this.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I have spoken to Mr. Chalmers, and when he wrote that original letter, it wasn't his understanding—but I will talk about that again. This government has killed the manufacturing industry with their high taxes and red tape. Now they've set their targets on the small construction companies of this province. We understand that the Small Business Agency of Ontario, which operates under your ministry, looked at this bill over a year ago and said it was a bad idea. Minister, if this bill passes, there won't be any small businesses left in this province and you'll be doing yourself out of a job. Is that what it's going to take for you to stand up for small business? Do your job and fight against this bill.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Actually, I want to ask the member from Sarnia if he really believes in what Mr. Chalmers said or not. Does he say that Mr. Chalmers didn't say it, or that he doesn't believe what he said?

I'm actually not sure how many small businesses the member from Sarnia visited, but let me just give you a couple of examples of how many businesses I visited in the month of September, and I did not hear once about this issue from any of those businesses. I visited Samco Machinery. I have been to Methes energy; I have been to ProMation Engineering; I have been to Icyene in Mississauga. I had the chance to go and visit the Toronto Business Development Centre. I visited, actually, five places there. I want to tell you, based on my experience in talking to the small businesses, and maybe this will come as a surprise to the member from Sarnia, if he—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

MUNICIPAL FINANCES

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Acting Premier. On Friday, Statistics Canada released its GDP report, which shows serious economic problems in Ontario. Manufacturing employment continued to decline. Construction showed a real retreat.

This economic downturn means that this year, now, and next year, municipalities have to bear increased Ontario Works costs. But the agreement the McGuinty government forced on municipalities does nothing for them this year and does nothing for them in 2009.

My question: How could the McGuinty government pretend that this agreement is going to help municipalities when it does nothing for them in 2008 and nothing for them in 2009, at a time when Ontario Works costs are skyrocketing?

Hon. George Smitherman: On subsequent supplementaries, if they stay on the same theme, I'll be asking the Minister of Municipal Affairs to respond. I wanted to make sure that all members of the House were given the appropriate opportunity to recognize the Minister of Municipal Affairs for this landmark work he has done with municipalities in the province of Ontario.

By coincidence, earlier today I had the privilege of a lengthy meeting with Councillor Peter Hume, from the city of Ottawa, who is the president of AMO. Not only was he still expressing a very positive view about the historic agreement that was reached; he was also very, very pleased that soon the province of Ontario will be flowing \$1.1 billion in infrastructure investments to municipalities for this year, something that the president of AMO was very pleased to have coming.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: As usual, this was another McGuinty exercise in promising to maybe, perhaps do something 10 years from now, when the urgent problem is today.

I want to quote someone who says he knows a lot about this: "What happens when the economy goes down? I'll tell you what happens: The welfare caseloads go up, the number of property taxpaying citizens goes down and those who are left are faced with an increasingly difficult burden" that they have to pay. Who said that? Dwight Duncan, the finance minister, just a few years ago. But today, the McGuinty government says to municipalities, "While you're facing tough times, you're on your own in 2008, you're on your own in 2009 and we might spare you \$12 million in 2010."

I ask again, how is this helping municipalities at a time when their Ontario Works costs are skyrocketing?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Jim Watson: I'm very, very pleased to answer the honourable member's question and correct him once again.

First of all, the notion that no money is flowing is absolutely ludicrous. When the McGuinty government had the opportunity and the honour to be sworn in, in 2003, we began the process of uploading, whether it's gas tax, land ambulance, public health costs or ODP, ODSP. We have gone from providing our municipal partners with approximately \$1.1 billion in 2003 to \$2.2 billion this year, and by the time this entire agreement is fully implemented, it will be up to \$3.8 billion. That is a 250% increase in support to our partners.

I challenge the honourable member to stop denouncing the municipal sector and support them as partners, as we support them.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The mayor of Sarnia, a two-time Liberal candidate, says that anybody who thinks this is a good deal obviously thinks Napoleon won at Waterloo.

I want to quote somebody else: "The municipality is put in a position of having to raise property taxes at precisely the time, from an economic perspective, that they shouldn't have to do it. Now as we put these additional costs onto the ... property tax bill, it's going to be even more difficult." That's the situation the McGuinty government has put municipalities in today, in 2008, next year, in 2009, and in 2010 and 2011. What is the McGuinty government's answer? "Oh, we'll do something about it in 2018." How is that a good deal?

Hon. Jim Watson: Well, that's a little rich, coming from a member whose party downloaded hundreds of millions of dollars under the guise of the social contract. Where was the great man of principle then? Did he give up his car and driver? Did he leave cabinet?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Don't stop the clock. Member from Hamilton East—

Mr. Paul Miller: I'll go back to my seat.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

Hon. Jim Watson: Where was the great man of principle? Did he resign from cabinet, outraged over the downloading his party partook in when it came to the social contract?

Let me quote a gentleman who said: "'I've never seen this in a government at a time like this.' Rodriguez lauded the McGuinty Liberals for talking another step forward in reversing the disastrous downloads of the Harris Conservatives." That's John Rodriguez, a former New Democratic member of Parliament, who is now the mayor of Sudbury.

I need no lessons when it comes to helping and supporting our municipal sector—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

1050

MUNICIPAL FINANCES

Mr. Howard Hampton: I think the McGuinty government is protesting against that well-known Liberal,

Bob Rae. I say to you: He's all yours; protest against him all you want—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Who is the question to, please?

Mr. Howard Hampton: Again, to the Acting Premier: I want to point out again what's in this deal for municipalities. In 2008, as their Ontario Works skyrocket—nothing. In 2009, as more jobs are lost and Ontario Works costs skyrocket—nothing. In 2010: a paltry \$12 million. The costs of court security for municipalities is \$525 million a year.

Again, my question to the McGuinty Liberals: At a time when costs for municipalities are skyrocketing, this year, next year, in 2010, do you really think—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Deputy Premier?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Jim Watson: Once again, the honourable member from the NDP has got his facts entirely wrong. He clearly stated that there would be no benefit in 2008 for Ontario municipalities. You're wrong. There's \$158 million that has already flowed to the municipal sector. In 2009, we begin the upload of 100% of ODSP administrative costs, saving municipalities \$86 million. In 2010, we begin one half of the ODSP benefits cost, saving municipalities \$310 million.

I'd much rather quote an esteemed leader named Hazel McCallion, who said, "Downloading is going to end and uploading is going to take over. The water is flowing up rather than down." I'd rather have Hazel McCallion, David Miller, and the president of AMO on my side supporting this deal than the ranting and raving of a failed ideology on the other side—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I'm merely going to stick to the facts. AMO itself says that under the McGuinty Liberals, the cost of downloading has gone from \$3.2 billion, when the McGuinty Liberals assumed office, to \$3.9 billion now. Only the McGuinty Liberals would claim that that's a good deal. But just how this deal works for Hamilton: Ontario Works and court security costs for Hamilton are nearly \$25 million a year. Hamilton property taxpayers will still be paying almost all of that by the time the next provincial election comes around. Windsor property taxpayers cover \$12 million for Ontario Works and court security alone.

Tell me: What, in this agreement, is going to do anything to relieve the pressure on municipal property taxpayers in Hamilton and Windsor?

Hon. Jim Watson: Let me answer the question directly: The good people of Hamilton, thanks to the work of Ted McMeekin and our good colleague from Hamilton Mountain—strong voices for Hamilton—benefit: \$72 million for the people of Hamilton. The good people of Windsor, represented so ably by my colleagues from Essex and our two cabinet colleagues, Ministers Duncan and Papatello, are going to benefit to the tune of \$35.3 million.

Let me quote Eddie Francis, who was a signatory to this important document, when he said:

"Once all in, it's a significant amount of money. That aside, it's the first time in a long time you have social service costs being moved away from the property tax base and the responsibility being parked with the province. That's significant.

"In terms of any argument that it's too slow—we had nothing yesterday. We were paying for all of it. We now have a commitment and timetable to upload it. I will take that any day."

The municipal sector is happy with this—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Here is the reality: The money that the McGuinty government is going to make available not this year, not next year, but in 2010 and 2011, won't even cover the costs of municipal taxpayers in Windsor and Hamilton, not to speak of all the other municipalities in the province. The McGuinty government continues to say, "But wait for 2018." What we can be sure of is this: Costs will be much higher in 2018. And what we can be sure of with McGuinty government promises is that they're not worth the paper they're printed on. That has been proven over and over and over again.

I ask the question again: When the finance minister himself says this is blatantly unfair, how does the McGuinty government think that this is a good deal for municipalities?

Hon. Jim Watson: I would encourage the leader of the third party to go to the website of the wannabe leader the member from Hamilton, because she has an interesting press release dated August 23, 2008, where she's claiming—I don't know if it's her policy, or the party platform, or the leader's policy, or the leader-in-waiting's policy—that she wouldn't begin her uploading until 2011, at a smaller rate than what we're providing the municipal sector. So we need no lessons from the NDP when it comes to talking about partnerships with the municipal sector.

Let me just tell you a little bit about what we're doing on the infrastructure front. We have seen a \$6.6-billion investment in infrastructure directly to the municipal sector and that is going to roads and bridges and community centres and libraries, something that was completely foreign when the NDP were in office. We're building communities with communities—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Robert Bailey: My question is for the Minister of Small Business, and it's in regard to the impact of Bill 119 on small businesses. If passed, Bill 119 will put an \$11,000 tax on small and medium-sized businesses all around Ontario. Since last week, MPPs' offices have been bombarded with faxes, letters and phone calls indi-

cating that this new tax on small business will mean the death of those businesses. Minister, as this government's protector of small business, will you commit immediately to urge your colleague the government House leader to not shut down debate on this bill, like you are doing with the budget bill later this week?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Health and safety is important for this government, and that's exactly what we are doing in the construction industry.

We are looking forward to the debate, and I hope the member will participate in this debate. But I really want to ask the member again: Do you agree with Mr. Chalmers or not, when he said, "Congratulations. Absolutely brilliant. This will make Ontario a safer workplace and improve the quality of life for all of us"?

I think the small businesses out there are not looking for a handout; they're looking for our support. Let me just talk about a couple of the support programs that our government has for small businesses. We just introduced an export access program through the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, so that our small businesses can showcase their products not just in North America but anywhere else in the world, wherever they want to do business. That is what is going to help the small businesses grow and prosper in this province—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Back to the same minister: Stakeholders from all over Ontario have been firm in their demand that they be heard on this bill in committee and communities across this province. I know that traditionally under this government, committees do not travel when the House is sitting. Minister, would you today commit to urging your government House leader to allow this bill to go to committee and travel the province when the House isn't sitting, so we can hear from our small business people around this province who are fearful of losing their livelihoods?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Let me tell you, I have been in touch with the small-business community on a regular basis, and I want to tell you that our small-business community, as I said before, is not looking for handouts; they're looking for a little bit of support.

We have 57 enterprise centres in this province that are willing to help our small businesses. We have advisory groups that are out there helping our small businesses. We have also reconfigured our AMIS program so that we can help the manufacturers who are struggling a little bit because of the weak US economy. We have the eastern Ontario economic development fund, solely dedicated to small businesses so that they can take advantage of some of the programs that we have developed in that region, as well.

So I'm very proud of what our government has done and how we have worked in a very collaborative manner with the small-business community. They are very appreciative of what we have—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Deputy Premier. While the McGuinty government has looked on from the sidelines, 230,000 manufacturing jobs have disappeared. New Democrats have laid out a real jobs plan with strategies that have worked successfully elsewhere. One of those is a manufacturing investment tax credit that would reward manufacturers for investing in plant machinery and for creating good-paying jobs. In finance estimates last week, the finance minister commented that the credit was "a worthy idea and something we have to look at seriously."

Deputy Premier, if the manufacturing credit is such a good idea, as the finance minister now says, why hasn't your government taken immediate action to implement it?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Economic Development.

1100

Hon. Michael Bryant: Let me start by saying, obviously, the Minister of Finance indicated what this government's approach is, particularly during this economic crunch and crisis, which is, if the members come forward with ideas that are of assistance, we certainly want to embrace those ideas, if in fact it's something that the government has not yet been doing. But I will say to the member that there are business tax cuts and credits in place that the member voted against that we put into place to support that particular industry. The entire purpose of the advanced manufacturing investment strategy is to provide direct assistance to the manufacturing industry in order to help them innovate, grow and retain and grow jobs and I'm happy to talk about the successes of that program today. But again, I say to the member, we welcome all suggestions, as the finance minister said, but we will continue to build on this strategy that will continue to retain and grow jobs in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Michael Prue: I would gladly take credit for having posed that question to the Minister of Finance, but it was not me; it was the Liberal backbencher from Mississauga-Brampton South who raised the question.

The point is that Ontario's manufacturing communities can't wait any longer. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Quebec introduced exactly this sort of credit years ago. The CAW supports it. The manufacturers and exporters' association supports it. Basically everyone who has anything to say with manufacturing supports that credit.

Will the government take immediate action to implement a manufacturing investment tax credit or will it continue to sit on the sidelines while thousands more good-paying jobs are lost?

Hon. Michael Bryant: Now the idea sounds even more promising, and I just want to congratulate the member from Mississauga for bringing it forward.

Let's be clear: This government provided \$190 million in rebates. That's what this government has brought forward in the past and previous budgets. Of those \$190

million in rebates, there have been a number of success stories. But let's be clear: The rebate package in the budget that came before this House was brought by this government and was voted against by that member and that party over there.

So I say to the member, while we welcome his encouragement, not only of the member spoken of from Mississauga but also this government's rebate program, it is a little late in the game and the member has not shown a commitment to these rebates up until now. But we welcome his encouragement on this front and look forward to further encouragement on the McGuinty government's programs.

MUNICIPAL FINANCES

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Minister, you have been asked quite a few questions about the announcement Friday. Let me ask you about its impact on Ottawa.

The city of Ottawa council has spoken to me on numerous occasions about the struggles they face since provincial programs were downloaded onto their backs. Although it has been several years, I know they are still feeling the effects of the early 1990s. Like many municipalities across the province, they struggle to maintain services and infrastructure to residents of communities like those in my riding of Ottawa Centre. It's no surprise to learn that my constituents are pleased that over the last few years we have worked diligently with the Ottawa community to make much-needed investments, including the just recently announced \$77 million under the Investing in Ontario Act. When you and the Honourable Minister of Finance made that investment, you made it clear in this House that the money could be spent on infrastructure projects.

Minister, can you tell us what is in the review, which you announced Friday, and how that will benefit the city of Ottawa?

Hon. Jim Watson: I'm very proud to answer the honourable member's question for a couple reasons. I happened to be mayor of Ottawa during the downloading of the Harris government, and I was a city councillor during the social contract downloading of the NDP. So the number one, two and three items that the municipal sector has been working on for a long time to get uploaded were ODP, ODSP, Ontario Works and court security and prisoner transportation. As a result of the consensus agreement reached unanimously by the city of Toronto and AMO, I'm pleased to report that the people of Ottawa, the taxpayers of Ottawa and the municipality of Ottawa, by the time the plan is fully implemented, will save \$122 million.

Let me quote my colleague Peter Hume. Peter Hume said, "This report turns the page on a dark chapter of provincial-municipal fiscal relations. The consensus reflected in this report sets out the changes that reflect the highest priority of our municipal governments and"—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I'm sure that the city of Ottawa is pleased that we are continuing to take steps to alleviate the financial burden they face and to make it easier for them to respond to the infrastructure and services needs in our communities. But we all know that Ontario is facing challenging economic times. There are parts of the economy we can't control: fluctuations in the dollar, interest rates, a weakened US trading partner, high oil prices and competition from overseas. I'm sure we can all agree that these economic times call for prudent planning, and our Minister of Finance has responded with a strategic five-point plan for the province. Minister, it's no secret that municipalities have been asking us to make it easier for them to plan for the future during these challenging economic times. Can the minister tell us how the review allows cities like Ottawa to plan for the future during these challenging economic times?

Hon. Jim Watson: The fact of the matter is, this gives predictability and stability to the municipal sector, something that they have been looking for for a long time.

My colleague from Carleton-Mississippi Mills says that the mayor of Ottawa doesn't like this government or this agreement. Let me quote from Nepean This Week, where Mayor O'Brien said, "The province of Ontario has never in its history been as good to eastern Ontario and Ottawa as it has been over the last two years while I have been mayor. Our relationship is warm, it's co-operative and it's moving to the future. All I can say is, I'm very, very happy the city of Ottawa is working in this manner with the McGuinty government because they are coming through for the city of Ottawa."

I am proud of the fact that after years and years of downloading under the Conservatives and the NDP, we've turned the page, we're moving forward, we're supporting our municipal partners, we're not name-calling and we're respecting those men and women who serve in counties and in regions and in cities and we will—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

VIOLENT CRIME

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is for the Attorney General. This past Saturday I attended the funeral of Bailey Zaveda, the Brockville girl killed in the shooting last weekend in downtown Toronto. In making his tribute to Bailey, her brother Ryan expressed the wish that she not become just another crime statistic.

For the last week, we have pointed to the tools that your crown lawyers could have used to keep Bailey's alleged killer, Kyle Weese, off the streets. So I ask you again, Minister, if the police considered Weese to be a dangerous, violent man, why did your crown lawyers cut a deal with him and drop six of seven charges instead of bringing a dangerous offender application to keep him behind bars for good?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: My sympathies and all of our sympathies are with the family and with those deeply

touched and affected. We're angry. We're all angry about how this could have happened.

What can be done in the future to make sure that tragedies like this do not happen again? What I say to the honourable member and what I say to the family and to the communities is, we are going to do all that needs to be done. We're going to prosecute those responsible to the full extent of the law and we are going to take measures, right now, within the crowns' office, to do what needs to be done to prevent tragedies like this from happening in the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Those are good words, but, Minister, your crowns now have a significant number of tools available to protect the public from high-risk offenders: opposing bail and appealing bad bail decisions, insisting on electronic monitoring, prosecuting bail and probation breaches, opposing high-risk parole releases—I could go on, Minister.

We know that three years ago your government wanted to cut \$340 million from the justice system but publicly backed away after the so-called summer of the gun in 2005. Minister, are you making those cuts now behind closed doors? Is this why innocent people are dying?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: When we say that our sympathies are with the victim and with the families and our memories of her will last long beyond today, we are angry at what happened and determined to prevent tragedies like this from happening again.

All those steps have been made over the past five years. We're going to lock the revolving door of justice by doing whatever we can. There are three exit points from justice. There is bail, there is sentencing, and there is parole and what happens after. We are developing a strategy now to do, in the crowns' office, whatever additionally we can do to lock that revolving door of justice to prevent these tragedies from happening in the future.

1110

CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. Minister, in a Toronto Sun article on October 29, you are quoted as saying, "My ministry has not changed the rules in regard to eligibility in the TCA program. The specification of what 'temporary' means has changed."

Minister, it's obvious that redefining the meaning of the term "temporary" is a change to the eligibility rules. It means that grandchildren being raised by their grandparents no longer qualify for temporary care assistance.

Will this minister commit today to reinstating the old definitions and interpretations so that every grandchild being raised by his or her grandparents is eligible for temporary care assistance?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Again, I want to say thank you to the grandparents who believe they have a responsibility towards their children in difficulty.

This government is supporting grandparents by providing temporary care assistance and a host of other pro-

grams in the long term. Again, I say to the grandparents that when they qualify for temporary care assistance, they will continue to get temporary care assistance. Besides that, when they receive temporary care assistance, they receive all sorts of other programs like health care, dental, vision, medication, all of these programs that they are entitled to. When it's not temporary anymore, there are other programs that they can apply to and be eligible for.

Mr. Paul Miller: This is unbelievable. The minister knows that grandchildren who are being raised by their grandparents are always in a temporary care situation. A parent can at any time go to the court and regain custody within seven days.

One grandmother called my office on Friday, sobbing. She's 74 years old and has just been diagnosed with cancer. She has been receiving temporary care assistance for nine years. As a direct result of your redefinition of "temporary," she has been cut off and now cannot afford to care for her grandchild. They do not qualify for any other assistance programs that you keep talking about.

The minister can do the only right thing today: Redefine her new definition of "temporary" to include all grandchildren being raised by their grandparents in this province.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: After this member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek blew the whistle on the grandparents, now he's out here telling us that he wants the program to be income-tested and that he also wants to put a time limit on the program. There is no time limit to the program, and the director of the program in each of the municipalities has the flexibility to judge if it's temporary or not.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would just ask the member from Hamilton East, for not the last comment he made but the second-last comment that he made, if he would withdraw it, please.

Mr. Paul Miller: Mr. Speaker, which one would that be?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Withdraw the comment, please.

Mr. Paul Miller: The last comment was "disgrace," or which one—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Withdraw the comment, please.

Mr. Paul Miller: Okay, I withdraw.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

Mr. Jim Brownell: To the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities: Minister, in my career as an educator, I had the privilege of teaching young people the knowledge and reasoning skills that would serve them later in life and of encouraging them to pursue higher levels of education that would help them to career opportunities that they could be passionate about. Many of my students came from families that didn't have the greatest means of helping their children to be able to go on to post-secondary education. I know that I, myself,

would have been unable to pursue post-secondary education without the support and help of the government of the day.

Minister, in today's tough economic climate, is our government prepared to assist students, especially from disadvantaged families, from rural regions like my riding of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, to access post-secondary education?

Hon. John Milloy: I want to congratulate the member and acknowledge his advocacy on behalf of post-secondary education in this province and the important work that he did as an educator.

I'm pleased to tell him that one of the cornerstones of the Reaching Higher plan was student assistance. Of the \$6.2 billion invested, \$1.5 billion was specifically geared to allowing greater access for students and to overcome financial burdens.

Under the Reaching Higher plan, we also have the access to opportunities strategy. Last year, we invested \$20 million to expand services and supports for aboriginal students, for students with disabilities and for first generation students. We've also expanded French-language studies for francophone students.

Our government has more than doubled the number of students who qualify for non-repayable grants by reinstating access grants, and we changed the criteria so these are available for students from families earning up to \$78,000. I'm pleased to say—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Brownell: I know that my constituents will be happy to hear that. Indeed, I try on as many occasions as possible to let my constituents know, both the young men and women looking to pursue higher education for the first time and those recently unemployed individuals looking to upgrade their skills and seeking those new opportunities in life.

Education and opportunity go hand in hand. When you grow your skill sets, you increase the opportunities available. When a community, as a whole, has a higher level of education, it provides opportunities to business, particularly next generation businesses, looking for highly trained individuals to help them pursue their activities.

I believe that our government is providing expanded opportunities to those looking to pursue higher learning. It is equally important that people looking for opportunities know where to find them. Again to the minister: What is our government doing to ensure that the people of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry and all of Ontario are fully informed of the opportunities we have created?

Hon. John Milloy: I thank the member for the question. He raises a very valuable point, that we want to make sure that every student has access to information about all the supports that are available to them as they pursue college or university education.

Information on financial assistance is available on the Ontario student assistance program website and through financial aid offices at every college and university in the province. The OSAP website is well known and exten-

sively used; in fact, over the last 12-month period, the OSAP website received more than six million visits. We've also developed materials aimed specifically at students we are reaching out to through our access to opportunities strategy. Students can visit www.ontario.ca/yourfuture to get information on financial aid. As well, the website provides an online forum for students to get together and share ideas and information on student assistance.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: To the Minister of Education: My caucus colleagues and I believe in protecting our most vulnerable citizens. Today in the gallery, we have parents of a child who suffered student-on-student abuse, which has gone unanswered by your ministry.

Minister, as usual, you continue to silence the voices of those who desperately need a voice, desperately need a champion and desperately need protection, all for the sake of protecting your reputation in education. I guess if you don't deal with it, it doesn't exist. That's not good enough for me, and it's certainly not good enough for the victims and their families affected by your refusal to implement mandatory reporting. When will you face the facts and finally implement mandatory reporting in your schools?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: First of all, I want to thank the parents who are here today, who are obviously dealing with difficult situations. It is absolutely the intention, and has been the record of this government, to confront the difficult issues of school safety that confront our schools in the province.

When we came into office, we began immediately to revise the legislation that had been put in place by the previous government that did not deal fairly with students across the system, that actually created situations where kids were out of school on limited expulsions without any support programs. That has stopped.

Currently, my parliamentary assistant, the member for Guelph, is leading the safe schools action team. They are looking at what kinds of reporting gaps exist among the different legislation, and we will be addressing those gaps.

1120

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: Those revisions are not effective. They are an insult to families in the gallery today who have children who have suffered the unimaginable at the hands of childhood perpetrators. The bottom line is that your trumped-up excuse for the safety plan in schools is not keeping our students safe at all from perpetrators. The safety plans have no teeth and there are no penalties for reoffending other than a mild scolding.

Minister, the student-on-student attacks are not isolated incidents and not just in one school board. They are happening across our province. The issue needs to be addressed now. Minister, will you finally stand up for the vulnerable students who have lost their voice in your

education system and provide them with a date—they need a date—when you will implement mandatory reporting in our schools?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: There are two million students who go to school in this province every day in 5,000 publicly funded schools. There is more money in this system to provide caring adults—whether it's teachers, social workers or psychologists—with \$43 million this year alone to increase those supports. What's unacceptable is for any member of this House to make a political spectacle of the trials that parents have to deal with. I understand that there are difficult situations that parents go through. But what this government will not do is cut loose a student who is struggling—whether that student is a victim or whether that student is a perpetrator. It is our responsibility, as the adults in government, as the adults in charge, to make sure that every student in our system has a chance to be a functioning citizen. If we don't pay now, we pay later. We need those kids functioning now.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. The member for Beaches–East York.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Madam Minister, how often did participants in the government's by-invitation-only poverty consultations ask that better access to safe and affordable housing be part of the government's upcoming poverty reduction plan?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: There is no question that housing is a very important component of any poverty reduction strategy. That is why we are having a separate, long-term affordable housing strategy that will be developed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. We know that without stable housing, kids can't thrive at school. Without stable housing, kids can't have the roots in their community that they need. Did we hear about housing? Absolutely. Are we prepared to address housing? Absolutely.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: I'm glad to hear that the minister at least acknowledges that it should be a priority. Affordable housing was the top anti-poverty priority for Ontarians in last week's Environics poll. It was also the most-often-mentioned concern in letters from organizations during the consultations. It was the number one concern raised at our party's eight open town hall meetings. Hundreds of thousands of Ontarians are waiting for affordable housing up to 20 years. But in the last week there was nothing at all to help cash-strapped municipalities deal with this housing crisis in the funding announcement on Friday. My question to you is, will you promise now that your poverty plan will include a long-overdue new investment in affordable housing to address the crisis situation that Ontarians find themselves in today?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Jim Watson: Let me once again correct the record from the NDP. The fact of the matter is we've already delivered \$100 million—the largest single repair and rehabilitation fund in Ontario's history. Secondly, we campaigned in the last election that we would put together a long-term affordable housing strategy; we are going to do that. Thirdly, let me just talk about the NDP promises, because they put out their document and they're calling for 12,000 rent supplements. Already, this government has delivered 35,000 rent supplements. They call for 7,000 affordable housing units. Already we have delivered 14,900 affordable housing units. This side of the House is completely underwhelmed by the ambitions of the NDP. We suggest that the honourable member look at our track record, what we've done and the partnerships that we've developed with—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. David Zimmer: My question is for the Minister of Tourism. Ontario's Environmental Commissioner has released his report for 2007-08. The Environmental Commissioner reported on the government's compliance with the Environmental Bill of Rights. The commissioner also announced that the Ministry of Tourism has earned both an award and an honourable mention for its leadership in environmental issues.

Minister, what was the award for? What was the honourable mention for? What does it mean for Ontario?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I'd like to thank the member for Willowdale. In fact, he is correct. The Ministry of Tourism's agency, the Metro Toronto Convention Centre, has won an ECO Recognition Award from the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario. I appreciate the opportunity to celebrate with them this achievement.

The centre won its award for its Zero Waste events. The Metro Toronto Convention Centre offers several eco-friendly options, including recycling and energy efficiency conservation for conventions and meetings. In fact, I'm proud to point out that they have already offered 14 Zero Waste events at the publication of the report of the Environmental Commissioner, and on average, the waste diversion of these events is 97%.

The 97% waste diversion rate for these 14 events saved a total of 57 trees, 75,000 litres of water, almost 40,000 kilowatts of energy, over 16,000 litres of—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. David Zimmer: Eco-tourism is popular in the tourism sector. The Zero Waste events that the Metro convention centre offers are an option that benefit those looking to mitigate their ecological footprint and practise waste diversion when they're choosing a site to have an international conference or event.

As I said in my first question, I know that another agency of the ministry has received an honourable men-

tion from the Environmental Commissioner. Minister, what was the honourable mention for? What does that mean for Ontario?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: The St. Lawrence Parks Commission, an agency of the Ministry of Tourism, received an honourable mention for its initiative, the initiative that they've undertaken with the Thousand Islands-Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve. This honourable mention was awarded to the ministry for its ongoing partnership efforts with the biosphere in promoting environmental protection, sustainable development and cultural awareness.

The biosphere has several environmentally focused programs and initiatives, including eco-tours, species-at-risk programs, from-farm-to-table programs, sustainable tourism workshops and environmental education networks. The Frontenac Arch Biosphere, which is a UNESCO-designated reserve, is only one of 13 such reserves in Canada.

I'm very proud of the work of the St. Lawrence Parks Commission and of the Metro Toronto Convention Centre for proceeding in these environmentally sensitive ways—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Minister of Education. Minister, my constituent is sitting in the gallery here today and the fact of the matter is, if she had not been a teacher in the school where her child was subjected to student-on-student abuse, that child would not have had a safe refuge in that school. This child would ask his mother and his counsellor why he had to change his routines and why he was being punished for telling, while the student who abused him could do whatever he pleased. This is a disgrace, Minister. Your ministry knew about this in 2007, yet you did nothing. Why are you continuing to cover this issue up at the expense of this vulnerable child?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just ask the member to withdraw the last comment that she made, please.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I will withdraw that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I don't know the specific situation to which the member opposite is referring, but what I can say is that we have required schools across the province to implement anti-bullying strategies. We have increased the resources that are available to schools. We've increased the resources so that buildings can be reconfigured to make them safer, in terms of being able to see the front doors. The most important thing we've done is we've increased the number of adults in our schools. There are thousands more teachers, thousands more support workers, psychologists and social workers. The point is—and I answered this in the ques-

tion previously—that all the students in our schools need to have the supports they require so that they can succeed. Whether that student is a victim of an incident or whether that student is a perpetrator, we have to keep all of those kids very close to us, because—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

1130

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Minister, you can say that you're not aware of this all you like, but the fact is these parents had to go to the media in 2007 out of sheer desperation because your ministry refused to do anything for them. The time for ignoring these parents and all the other families who have the courage to come forward is over. Please tell us when you're going to implement mandatory reporting of these incidents in schools so that police and counsellors and other parties can finally come to help these children.

Hon. Kathleen Wynne: First of all, I'd be happy to talk with these parents. Again, I haven't met with them specifically; I'd be happy to do that. As I have said previously, the safe schools action team is looking where there are gaps in reporting. There are provisions for mandatory reporting that are included in a number of pieces of legislation. Where there are gaps, we are going to be working to address those.

But the most important thing we can do is to make sure that our schools have the resources that they need to prevent violent incidents from happening in the first place. The most important thing we can do, when an incident takes place, is to make sure that the young people involved get the supports they need to get them back on track, and that is what we have been doing on this side of the House. We have been putting resources into the system to ensure that every child, every student in our system, gets the supports that they need—not just some of the students, as the member opposite would suggest that some students—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question?

SEWAGE SLUDGE

M^{me} France Gélinas: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. As the minister responsible for the health of Ontarians, is the minister concerned about the health impact of eating food that has been fertilized with our sewers?

Hon. David Caplan: I'm going to refer this question to the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: It's a very important question indeed. I'm happy that I have the opportunity to again address this in the House. I think that with respect to the spreading of non-agricultural source material, I did indicate in the House last week that there has been a posting on the Environmental Bill of Rights registry, and that the Ministry of the Environment is carefully reviewing the input that we would have received on that. That would include the spreading of sewage sludge. I think it's

also important to have the people understand that before anything is spread on a farm property, it has to be treated. There is also a requirement for the operator to have a certificate of approval from the Ministry of the Environment. There are very clear and stringent guidelines with respect to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I asked the question of the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care because I want to know if he's concerned about the health of the people of Ontario, because Ontarians have concerns about the health impact of eating foods from farmland fertilized with sewage sludge. Environmentalists, farmers, activists, doctors and scientists all suggest we hold off applying sewage sludge until more studies have been done to test its impact on our health.

Why won't the Minister of Health heed the lessons of previous public health crises and stand up for the health of Ontarians with an immediate moratorium on using sewage sludge as a fertilizer on farms?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I think it's important to provide a little more information to the people in the assembly on this issue. With respect to the sludge that is spread in the province of Ontario, 85% of it is for forage crops and not for food crops. When it is used for food crops, there is an additional regulatory regimen that must be met.

Our government is absolutely very concerned and focused on ensuring that we have the safest and best-quality food. That is why we have put on the Environmental Bill of Rights registry the draft NASM—non-agricultural source material—regulation. We are very cognizant of wanting to protect our food products; we are very eager. If the honourable member is aware of studies or cases where the spreading of this product has been linked to a health issue—it's our information on this side of the House that that has not been the case. That's not—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Question period has ended.

This House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1135 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

COLLEGE WEEK

Mr. Jim Wilson: I rise in the House today to recognize College Week and the important role our community colleges play in strengthening the economy through the skilled trades.

As the Ontario economy faces significant challenges, I know the staff at our colleges are working hard to provide the necessary education and training needed to strengthen every sector of the economy. This week, we are celebrating the work colleges do in training workers in the skilled trades from automotive mechanics, electricians and carpentry.

Over 90% of college graduates find long-term, stable employment within six months of graduating. This is an outstanding track record and good reason for us to celebrate the contribution of our colleges.

More and more people are recognizing the value of a college education. Enrolment in colleges has seen a steady increase. This year, first-year enrolment at Ontario's colleges was 5.6% higher than it was in 2007.

In my riding of Simcoe-Grey, we are fortunate to have Georgian College and its president, Brian Tamblyn. At Georgian, just like other colleges across the province, they have close ties to industry, and industry is involved in making programs up to date and relevant to the workplace. These partnerships are important and contribute to strengthening the economy.

The PC caucus is very proud of the college system established by Premier Davis in the 1960s, and we invite all members, and indeed all Ontarians, to join us in this week's celebrations.

LISGAR GO STATION

Mr. Bob Delaney: Improvements to Mississauga's newest GO train station continue. Today, November 3, 2008, construction began at the Lisgar GO station for a wind turbine system. This is a pilot project to reduce electricity demand from the power grid and to generate the power used by the station. Local students sometimes ask me what Ontario is doing to generate renewable energy in their neighbourhood. This project is one example.

Work includes the construction of a 50-kilowatt wind turbine with foundation, a service access road and electrical work. Project completion is scheduled for early spring 2009.

Commuters, such as me, using the Lisgar GO train station will not find their access to their new station affected in any significant way. However, notices will be updated and posted as required. The majority of the construction work is north of the station access road on Argentia Road and away from the existing station and tracks.

Lisgar is the newest and greenest GO train station on the Milton line. It was designed from the very outset to accommodate the third track that will be completed as part of the \$17-billion Move Ontario 2020 program in the upcoming years. This project will enable commuters on the Milton line to have all-day traffic-free train service into and out of Toronto.

INTERVENOR FUNDING

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Three weeks ago in my constituency office in Kanata, I met a wonderful young woman, Caitlin Ryan. She's an incredible 16-year-old woman who just wants to go to university and live a normal life, but Caitlin is deaf, and unfortunately, she's going blind as well.

Through an interpreter, Caitlin explained to me that she will soon require an intervenor to act as her eyes and

her ears in everything she does. We all read the Helen Keller story and remember her teacher, Annie Sullivan. She was, before the role had a name, an intervenor. I might add that Helen Keller was fortunate in having an intervenor 24/7. Caitlin has help for only three hours a week outside of the time that she spends in school.

Ontario has a shortage of people who help people who are blind and deaf at the same time. They are called intervenors. The only training program is at George Brown College here in Toronto. I'd like to encourage the government to create a program in other colleges across Ontario to expand the access to intervenor services outside the Greater Toronto Area.

I want to take this opportunity to ask the Minister of Community and Social Services, on behalf of a wonderful young woman, Caitlin Ryan, to meet with her as soon as possible. I know—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: This winter, hundreds will die on our streets, either directly or indirectly. The homeless population is at greatly increased risk of violence, disease and suicide. Some will simply freeze to death. Meanwhile, both federal and provincial governments ignore the problem.

The McGuinty Liberals promised new builds of 20,000 a year back in 2003 and have delivered a tiny fraction, with the result that 125,000 families languish on the waiting list for five to 20 years. Environics and anti-poverty forums cite housing as their primary concern, to no avail. With the economy slowing, history has proven that housing starts begun by governments can actually assist economic recovery. So, what is the McGuinty Liberal government waiting for?

Federally, the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee has requested that all Ontarians sign on to their petition, "Housing Not War," calling for 1% of the budget to kick-start affordable housing across the country instead of spending untold billions on war.

For the homeless and the families waiting—sometimes dying—for affordable housing, concerted efforts of both levels of government are essential for what has been, for years now, a national and provincial disaster.

Anti-poverty activists are tired of being addressed by McGuinty cabinet ministers. In the immortal words of Michael Shapcott of the Wellesley Institute, "We don't want to be addressed; we want an address."

CANADIAN FORCES

Mr. Jim Brownell: Recently, in my riding of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, we were fortunate to have a visit and a two-day docking of the naval frigate HMCS Charlottetown. The ability to tour the ship provided constituents of the riding with a first-hand look into the world of our armed forces.

After being stationed in the Middle East, providing protection for citizens against the world drug trade and

other threats, this frigate had been doing a tour of the St. Lawrence River and Great Lakes to promote the Canadian navy.

I highly recommend touring the Charlottetown or any other ship in the Canadian navy, if you have the opportunity, not only to marvel at the sophistication of a naval vessel but also to provide encouragement to the many men and women who serve in our armed forces, and to convey that we appreciate the job they do around the world.

The docking in Cornwall had a very large impact on one local family in my riding. The Shaver family, from the town of Newington, were reunited with their son, Jamie, who serves as one of the 255 members of the Charlottetown's crew.

Servicemen and women like Jamie work in the service of our nation and live under the constant threat that they may be sent to dangerous and unstable areas of the world in order to provide security to those who need their help.

It makes me very proud that this young man and many other men and women from my riding and from across Ontario have chosen to dedicate their lives to service in the armed forces. They risk their safety so that we can continue to enjoy the benefits our free society offers, such as being in this Legislature.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Robert Bailey: I rise today to bring forward our concerns about the government's WSIB bill, Bill 119.

Today we asked the minister responsible for small business, the government's protector of small business, where he was and what he has done to stop this new tax. He couldn't answer that question. Many small business owners have told us they will simply have no choice but to go out of business. We know they have told the government the same thing.

Since debate started, we have been inundated with calls, letters and faxes from small business owners complaining about lack of consultation on a bill that, if passed, will put a new \$11,000-a-year tax on small and medium-sized businesses. With opposition to this bill growing daily, we are getting increasingly concerned that the government may attempt to cut off debate and limit the amount of time this bill is studied in committee.

The PC caucus here at Queen's Park wants to see Bill 119 referred to a standing committee and sent on the road around Ontario for extensive consultations. We hope the government doesn't think they can cut off debate on this new tax and not hear from those stakeholders who will be so dramatically impacted. We are calling today for the McGuinty government to allow committee hearings around this province on this very important issue.

1310

OPTOMETRISTS

Mr. Khalil Ramal: It's a privilege for me to welcome the Ontario Association of Optometrists, an organization

that for nearly 100 years has proudly supported the optometry profession in our province and raised public awareness about the importance of regular eye exams and good eye health through its focus on advocacy, community and education.

Ontario's optometrists provide front-line eye health and vision care to more than three million people a year. By detecting, diagnosing and prescribing appropriate treatments, optometrists care for people's vision and help prevent visual losses.

The OAO also contributes to Optometry Giving Sight, an initiative that helps 300 million people around the world who are blind or vision-impaired simply because they don't have access to eye exams or a pair of glasses.

I would like to invite all members of this House to come down to the dining room. There's a reception put on by the optometry association from 4 to 6 o'clock. I think it's very important for all the members of this place to learn about optometry. I think it's a very good group.

I want to welcome Dr. John Astles, who is with us here today, representing the optometrists.

Again, I remind all the members: 4 to 6. There's a good reception downstairs to learn about the eyes and how important optometrists are for the whole province.

CORBROOK

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I rise in the House today to speak about a very special organization in York South-Weston that I had the pleasure of visiting recently. Corbrook provides vital employment services for people living with disabilities. Originally founded as an organization for individuals with cerebral palsy, this year the group celebrates their 50th anniversary.

It offers work opportunities in their own packaging facility. Connected to their main location, the hands-on training facility builds important work experience and creates jobs in the riding of York South-Weston. With the help of Corbrook's work program, individuals with disabilities gain valuable experience which can then be used to integrate people into the wider workforce if they wish.

Corbrook also encourages participation in their REVEL program, which adds recreational activities, literacy programs and support structures to the resources made available by the organization.

Funded through the Ministry of Community and Social Services, Corbrook is an important organization in York South-Weston and I would like to take this opportunity to recognize their work and staff. With 28 staff, a deeply committed board and the capacity to serve up to 165 participants, as well as a second location in Scarborough, Corbrook represents a truly innovative approach to helping people with disabilities live productive and engaging lives once they have finished school.

MARJORIE BROOKS

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I recently had the pleasure of attending the presentation of Ontario's Medal for Good

Citizenship. My constituent Marjorie Brooks was recognized for her 60 years of volunteer work in Guelph.

In the 1960s, as coordinator for the TB association in Wellington county, Marj initiated an asthma training program and taught an anti-smoking program at elementary schools. During the 1970s, Marj was involved in the establishment of Wyndham House, a residence for homeless teenage girls in Guelph. But it was primarily for her involvement with the Guelph-Wellington branch of Stroke Recovery Canada that she was awarded the Medal for Good Citizenship.

After a lifetime of volunteerism, Marj herself suffered a stroke in 1997. As she recovered, she joined the Guelph-Wellington Stroke Recovery Group, and within two years was coordinating the group from her home.

She has dedicated herself to providing support for stroke survivors, visiting them while still in the hospital and providing them with important information about local services. Marj initiated a program that pairs a stroke survivor with a student from the University of Guelph to provide companionship, encouragement and assistance with exercises.

She coordinates monthly educational meetings for stroke survivors and caregivers, bimonthly newsletters and public awareness events during Stroke Recovery Awareness Month.

Congratulations, Marjorie. You are truly a deserving recipient of the Medal for Good Citizenship.

MOTIONS

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice with regard to Remembrance Day and the late Charlie Fox.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I move that on Tuesday, November 4, 2008, following statements by ministers and responses, and prior to petitions, up to seven minutes be allotted to each party to speak on Remembrance Day and the passing of Charlie Fox.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

TUITION

Mr. Jim Wilson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas undergraduate tuition fees in Ontario have increased by 195% since 1990 and are the third-highest in all of the provinces in Canada; and

"Whereas average student debt in Ontario has skyrocketed by 250% in the last 15 years to over \$25,000 for four years of study; and

"Whereas international students pay three to four times more for the same education, and domestic students in professional programs such as law or medicine pay as much tuition as \$20,000 per year; and

"Whereas 70% of new jobs require post-secondary education, and fees reduce the opportunity for many low- and middle-income families while magnifying barriers for aboriginal, rural, racialized and other marginalized students; and

"Whereas Ontario currently provides the lowest per capita funding for post-secondary education in Canada, while many countries fully fund higher education and charge little or no fees for college and university; and

"Whereas public opinion polls show that nearly three quarters of Ontarians think the government's Reaching Higher framework for tuition fee increases of 20% to 36% over four years is unfair;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, support the Canadian Federation of Students' call to immediately drop tuition fees to 2004 levels and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to introduce a new framework that:

"(1) Reduces tuition and ancillary fees annually for students.

"(2) Converts a portion of every student loan into a grant.

"(3) Increases per student funding above the national average."

I thank the Canadian Federation of Students for this petition. I agree with it and I will sign it.

CHILD CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition from the people of Nickel Belt and Sudbury:

"Whereas the amendment to Bill C-210, known as the kinship bill, has passed to the third party child services review board. This amendment does not extend payment to all grandparents and kin 'who previously' were granted custody of their kinship children;

We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We, the undersigned, do request the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to extend payments to all grandparents and kin who have been given custody of their kinship children. These payments were not included in the recent amendment and this discriminates against these grandparents as well as these kin children."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it with page Andrew.

WAYNE RYCZAK

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm pleased to introduce this petition on behalf of my riding of Niagara Falls and the riding of St. Catharines. The petition reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Wayne Ryczak was sentenced to 30 months plus one day for the murder of Stephanie Beck, we assert that this disposition was too lenient. We believe that, as a victim, Beck was discriminated against because of her engagement in the sex trade as a street-level sex worker. Ryczak was released one day after his sentence, with just 14 months served. Members of this community are shocked and outraged by the inappropriateness of this decision and request intervention of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"As members of this community, we assert that this sentence, 30 months plus one day, is a shameful miscarriage of justice. We ask that this sentence be appealed in the interests of the victim, the victim's family, and public safety."

I'm pleased to sign my signature in support of this petition.

1320

PROTECTION FOR MINERS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition from the people of North Bay and Mattawa.

"Whereas the current legislation contained in the Ontario health and safety act and regulations for mines and mining plants does not adequately protect the lives of miners, we request revisions to the act;

"Lyle Everett Defoe and the scoop tram he was operating fell 150 feet down an open stope (July 23, 2007). Lyle was 25 years and 15 days old when he was killed at Xstrata Kidd Creek mine site, Timmins.

"Section R-60" of the mining regulations says, "A shaft, raise or other opening in an underground mine shall be securely fenced, covered or otherwise guarded..." The stope where Lyle was killed was protected by a length of orange plastic snow fence and a rope with a warning sign. These barriers would not have been visible if the bucket of the scoop tram was raised. Lyle's body was recovered from behind the scoop tram."

They ask the Legislative assembly as follows:

"Concrete berms must be mandatory to protect all open stopes and raises;

"All miners and contractors working underground must have working communication devices and personal locators;

"All equipment involved in injuries and fatalities must be recovered and examined unless such recovery would endanger the lives of others; and

"The entire act must be reviewed and amended to better protect underground workers."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the table with Laura.

HOSPICES

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas hospices on church or hospital property do not pay taxes;

"Whereas hospices are not-for-profit organizations providing emotional, spiritual and bereavement support and respite care to terminally ill individuals and their family members;

"Whereas a residential hospice (usually an eight-to-10-bed home-like facility) provides around-the-clock care to terminally ill individuals and support to their families;

"Whereas hospice services are provided free of charge;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to allow hospices across the province to be exempt from municipal taxes."

I support this and will send it with Faye to the table.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the few times that I get to speak. I'll read a petition. It reads as follows:

"Whereas high gasoline prices are now unaffordable for the average person; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government's tax on a litre of gasoline is 14.7 cents; and

"Whereas the federal government's tax on a litre of gasoline is 10 cents ...;

"Therefore, we the undersigned hereby petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows"—

Mr. Mike Colle: That's not true. Tell the truth.

Mr. John O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, the truth is—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Member for Eglinton—Lawrence, please withdraw the comment.

Mr. Mike Colle: I withdraw the comment.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I don't need the assistance from the member for Durham to conduct my job as Speaker, thank you very much.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you very much, Speaker. With all the greatest respect, I'll continue. Maybe I should start at the beginning.

"Whereas high gasoline prices are now unaffordable for the average person; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government's tax on a litre of gasoline is 14.7 cents; and

"Whereas the federal government's tax on a litre of gasoline is 10 cents plus the GST;

"Therefore, we the undersigned hereby petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

"(1) That the McGuinty government immediately freeze gas prices for a temporary period until world oil prices moderate" and stabilize.

"(2) That the McGuinty government and the federal government immediately lower or eliminate their tax on gas for a temporary period until world oil prices" and other crises "moderate.

"(3) That the McGuinty government immediately initiate a royal commission to investigate the predatory

gas prices charged by oil companies operating in Ontario."

I'm pleased to sign and endorse this and present it to Chloe.

TUITION

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition from the students from the general assembly of Laurentian University:

"Whereas undergraduate tuition fees in Ontario have increased by 195% since 1990 and are the third-highest in all of the provinces in Canada; and

"Whereas average student debt in Ontario has skyrocketed by 250% in the last 15 years to over \$25,000 for four years of study; and

"Whereas international students pay three to four times more for the same education, and domestic students in professional programs such as law or medicine pay as much tuition as \$20,000 per year; and

"Whereas 70% of new jobs require post-secondary education, and fees reduce the opportunity for many low- and middle-income families while magnifying barriers for aboriginal, rural, racialized and other marginalized students; and

"Whereas Ontario currently provides the lowest per capita funding for post-secondary education in Canada, while many countries fully fund higher education and charge little or no fees for college and university; and

"Whereas public opinion polls show that nearly three quarters of Ontarians think the government's Reaching Higher framework for tuition fee increases of 20% to 36% over four years is unfair;"

Therefore, they ask the Legislative Assembly to introduce a new framework that would do three things: reduce tuition and ancillary fees annually for students, convert a portion of every student loan into a grant and increase per student funding above the national average.

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the Clerk with Andrew.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition from a number of citizens from my constituency.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents.

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of main-

taining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

As I agree with this petition, I shall affix my signature and send it to the clerks table.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Freeze Gas Prices,

"Whereas gasoline prices have increased at alarming rates during the past year; and

"Whereas the high and different gas prices in different areas of Ontario have caused confusion and unfair hardship on hard-working Cambridge families; and

"Whereas the false promises of Premier McGuinty adversely affect the trust between Ontarians and their elected representatives;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

"(1) That the McGuinty government immediately freeze gas prices for a temporary period until world oil prices moderate; and

"(2) That the McGuinty government immediately initiate a royal commission to investigate the predatory gas prices charged by oil companies operating in Ontario."

As I agree with the contents of this petition, I affix my name thereto.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly that was very kindly sent to me by Dr. Uzma Ahmed, who practises medicine out of the Meadowvale Town Centre medical centre. It has been signed by a number of her patients. It reads as follows:

"Whereas some 20,000 people each year choose to make their home in Mississauga, and a Halton-Peel District Health Council capacity study stated that Credit Valley Hospital should be operating 435 beds by now, and 514 beds by 2016"—and we go to the final part.

"That the ministry of Health and Long-Term Care undertake specific measures to ensure the allocation of capital funds ... at Credit Valley Hospital to ensure the

ongoing acute care needs of the patients and families served by the hospital are met in a timely and professional manner...."

I'm pleased to sign and support this, and to ask page Adriane to carry it for me.

TOM LONGBOAT

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Tom Longboat, a proud son of the Onondaga nation, was one of the most internationally celebrated athletes in Canadian history;

"Whereas Tom Longboat was voted as Canada's number one athlete of the 20th century by Maclean's magazine for his record-breaking marathon and long-distance triumphs against the world's best;

"Whereas Tom Longboat fought for his country in World War I and was wounded twice during his tour of duty;

"Whereas Tom Longboat is a proud symbol of the outstanding achievements and contributions of Canada's aboriginal people;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to recognize June 4 as Tom Longboat Day in Ontario."

I support this petition and will affix my name to it.

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CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm pleased to introduce this petition, and I want to thank Alex Alexander from Brooklin, Ontario, for providing me with hundreds of petitions on this. It says:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents, as requested in Bill 33.

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact

between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

I'm pleased to sign my signature in support of this petition.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I move that, pursuant to standing order 47 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 114, An Act respecting Budget measures, interim appropriations and other matters, to amend the Ottawa Congress Centre Act and to enact the Ontario Capital Growth Corporation Act, 2008, when Bill 114 is next called as a government order the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment and at such time the bill shall be ordered referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs; and

That except in the case of a recorded division arising from morning orders of the day, pursuant to standing order 9(c), no deferral of the second reading vote shall be permitted; and

That the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs meet on Thursday, November 6, 2008 from 9 a.m. to 10:25 a.m. for the purpose of public hearings on Bill 114, and on the same day at 2:30 p.m. for clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 114; and

That the deadline for filing amendments to the bill with the clerk of the committee shall be 12 noon on Wednesday, November 5, 2008. On Thursday, November 6, 2008, at no later than 5 p.m. those amendments which have not been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the chair of the committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining sections of the bill and any amendments thereto. The committee shall be authorized to meet beyond the normal hour of adjournment until completion of clause-by-clause consideration. Any division required shall be deferred until all remaining questions have been put and taken in succession with one 20-minute waiting period allowed pursuant to standing order 129(a); and

That the committee shall report the bill to the House no later than Monday, November 17, 2008. In the event that the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed to be passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House; and

That upon receiving the report of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, the Speaker

shall put the question for adoption of the report forthwith, and at such time the bill shall be ordered for third reading which order may be called on that same day; and

That on the day the order for third reading of the bill is called, one hour shall be allotted to the third reading stage of the bill, apportioned equally among the recognized parties. At the end of this time the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

That the vote on third reading may be deferred pursuant to standing order 28(h); and

That, in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to 10 minutes.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mrs. Dombrowsky has moved government notice of motion number 88. Debate?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I'm pleased today to be able to enter into the debate in respect to this particular motion as it relates to Bill 114. It gives me an opportunity to review and reflect, in a very short period of time, on some of the initiatives the government has taken over the past five years in respect to its budgetary strategies. Often, what best reflects on where one might go in the future is a bit of a review of some history as to where we've come from over a relatively short period of time, and it reflects on what our objectives are in the context of a plan for the province of Ontario.

We know that in 2003, when we took office, things were in a different situation than they are now, but we used that particular opportunity, as we moved into 2004, to bring forward into this Legislature a strategy and a budget plan to bring the province back to fiscal health. We set out a plan to clearly eliminate a deficit and bring the budget into balance. At that time, we spoke to the balance being during the first mandate. We did that.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Point of order.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: We did it in expedited fashion—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Excuse me. There has been a point of order.

Mr. Peter Kormos: On a point of order: I do want to indicate that I, for one, appreciate the Chair becoming a little firmer in terms of the standing orders and the parliamentary rules.

We're debating a time allocation motion. That's the whole thing. We're not debating Bill 114. We should be, but we're not, because it is a time allocation motion. So I say that this speaker shouldn't go in the back door when he can't get in the front door, and he should restrict himself to the time allocation motion and not Bill 114.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I thank the member for the point and remind members that we should be debating the motion on the floor.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Although I appreciate the interjection from the member opposite, it does eat up the clock, unfortunately, in that process.

The time allocation motion clearly speaks to our objectives as it relates to budgetary strategies and the capacity for the province to move forward.

After having dealt with things in 2004, we found ourselves moving on to the year 2005, when we set out a strategy at that point to invest in people in this province, having dealt with the fiscal health of the province earlier to that. The Reaching Higher plan set out opportunities in post-secondary education for college and university students to gain new opportunities as we move forward to meet the job demands of today in a time of some fiscal crisis that we find ourselves in.

As we moved forward into the year 2006, the third full year of our mandate during that period of time, we talked about the need to build opportunity.

Mr. Peter Kormos: On a point of order: If the member wants to explain why the government, pursuant to this motion, is only going to allow one hour and 25 minutes for public presentations, then that would be entirely in order. I welcome him to explain why the government is only going to allow 1 hour and 25 minutes for public participation. However, he's not discussing the motion. It's a lengthy motion. Good grief, a moron could debate for 20 minutes on this. There's—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I would ask the member from Welland to withdraw that remark.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Once again, I thank the member for Welland for the point, and remind members to be debating the motion that was put forward by the Minister of Agriculture.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: May I suggest that the member opposite certainly will have an opportunity, as the time for this motion is divided equally among the parties, to prove his point during the time he has to speak to it, as opposed to the interjections that he chooses.

We continue to move forward on an economic plan that requires us to debate various bills, including this one, that we will have in committee as early as this coming week.

We understand the importance of fiscal health in the province, we understand the importance to build on the strengths of people in this province and we understand the importance of building opportunities through infrastructure development within the province of Ontario. Recently, in planning on building a stronger Ontario, we committed over \$1.5 billion to a jobs-to-skills action plan. We've had lots of debate in here recently, both on Bill 114 as well as on the Premier's motion and opposition day motions, on the need to build on the future of this province. How better to do that than to invest many millions, if not billions, of dollars in preparing people for the new economy, which we're all faced with.

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One of the things we've wanted to achieve recently: We've been dealing with matters in the standing committee on finance, part of which is a strategy whereby we can go out to the people in the province of Ontario because they want the opportunity as well to input on—

Mr. Randy Hillier: On a point of order, Speaker:

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Excuse me for a minute, member for Pickering. Member for—

Mr. Randy Hillier: Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Close. Thank you.

Mr. Randy Hillier: There have been two points of orders raised already. The member opposite from Ajax–Pickering refuses to speak to this motion. It is unacceptable that the speaker opposite is not addressing the subject and is really in contempt of this House when he's talking about some other subject.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I would ask the member to simply state what the point of order is that he is referring to. Once again, I will remind the members that we are debating a motion that was brought forward by the government on time allocation. This motion does, of course, refer to a certain piece of legislation, but I expect that all members, as they debate this motion, would keep in mind that in fact it is the motion that we're debating. I would expect to hear from all sides a relationship back to the motion that's on the floor.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: In the very limited amount of time I have left, because some considerable amount has been eaten up on various motions from the side opposite, I'm going to be asking the members of this Legislature for support for the time allocation motion as it relates to Bill 114 so we can move forward as a province on those matters that we've speaking to that we set out in a strategic fashion. Those are matters of creating jobs in this province and improving the competitiveness for tomorrow in this province, and Speaker—

Mr. Peter Kormos: On a point of order—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The member from Welland on a point of order.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I expect, and I trust that the Chair does too, advocates of this motion to be explaining why they are going to be supporting the motion. I will have no difficulty explaining why I'll be opposing it. That is speaking with all due respect to the matter that's been called. Now, with respect, if the speaker is expanding the scope of debate here, I respect that as well and look forward to the opportunity to utilize that standard.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I thank the member for the point. As I mentioned, I will be listening very carefully, as is the role of Chair, to make sure that members are coming back to the motion on the floor. We all know that members use all kinds of methods in terms of getting to their point, but I ask members to leave it to the Chair to ensure that the debate is indeed relating to the motion that is on the floor.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: My final few seconds: This House has been a good teacher in respect to speaking to motions before the House, and the member opposite is one of the best in teaching that particular strategy.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I want to indicate to you that I'm speaking in opposition to this motion because we are considering under Bill 114 an omnibus act, an act which deals with 23 different statutes. I want to refer to some of the groups that might want to make a public presentation as a result of their being included in this act. I also want to express my concern that we are passing this motion today, November 3, and by November 6 everything is going to be done. There's going to be no opportunity for the committee of the Legislature to advertise in the paper, or to advertise at all—even on the parliamentary channel—to call for people to come in front of the committee to make their presentation and put forward their thoughts with regard to this particular bill.

I also point out that this particular motion provides for, I think, an hour and 25 minutes for public hearings on Thursday, November 6. That very afternoon, at 2:30, they're going to have what they call a clause-by-clause session. The clause-by-clause session goes through the particular bill and looks at each section, and people put forward amendments.

You tell me: How on earth can we go through a normal legislative process hearing public hearings in the morning for an hour and 25 minutes, and then expect the opposition parties or the public to come forward with meaningful and thoughtful amendments to the legislation presented by the government on 23 different statutes?

I would like to home in on some of the concerns that some people might have in this province with regard to schedule W, which is the last act that they deal with in this particular omnibus bill, the Tobacco Tax Act, which is a very lengthy part of the bill; it takes up about half of the bill. It refers, just in that one out of 23 different pieces of legislation, to wholesalers of tobacco, retailers of cigars and retailers of cigarettes. It refers to a whole host of people in our Ontario community. What notice are those people going to have of the hour-and-25-minute hearings that are going to occur this Thursday morning? What opportunity are the people who are involved with the sale of tobacco going to have with the new seizure powers given to officials under that particular act? For instance, the act allows the seizure of unmarked cigarettes if there are reasonable grounds to believe that a person is in possession of more than 200 unmarked cigarettes. Quite frankly, I agree with putting that in the bill, but I do think that people who are involved in this particular business should have the opportunity to come in front of the Legislature and make their case. As well, they might have a better section—I know this government is all-seeing and all-knowledgeable with regard to everything—but quite frankly, sometimes a smart government listens and takes a better suggestion from the people who are involved in that particular industry.

This act deals with a whole bunch of other things as well. It deals with, for instance, our Ottawa Congress Centre. It changes the name of our Ottawa Congress Centre to something else. It's a minor change. It changes

it to the Ottawa Convention Centre Corporation Act. I presume that the board of the Ottawa Congress Centre, as it now is, is in favour of the Congress Centre Act, but I don't know whether they're in favour of it. I believe that if they are not in favour of it, they should have the opportunity to come here to the Legislature and make their case as to whether they might want another name for that particular act.

Let me deal with some other ones as well which are perhaps even more important. Some of the acts in this particular legislation deal with the Corporations Tax Act. We know that we're going through a very, very difficult period of time with regard to our economy. In the act, it talks about expenditure limits for the Ontario tax exemption for commercialization. This increases those limitations. But what I'd like to hear from are corporations who might be involved in this area and might believe that there's not very much accessibility to this benefit that they might receive for commercialization of technology.

We could go through, section by section, act by act and make the case that the Ontario public, the people who are involved with this change of legislation, are being shut out by this closure motion, a closure motion which touches many people across Ontario, many businesses across Ontario, and shows the disdain that this government has for the normal processes that we have in place in this Legislature. Those processes are to be guarded. They are to be guarded by us in opposition. They should be guarded by every member of this Legislature to ensure that people in Ontario, groups that are affected by legislation have the opportunity to participate.

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This motion, with its very, very short time frame—the idea that here it is on Monday afternoon and the motion says that by November 6 the bill's going to be finished in committee. And guess what? It's going to come back to this Legislature and they're going to allow—even if we hear something from somebody in that hour and 25 minutes of huge public hearings, even if we hear something from them, the bill is going to be wrapped up in the afternoon.

Presumably the government has fouled up the bill in some way. They've probably already got the amendments in their pocket now. We in the opposition do not have those same kinds of resources to develop that kind of thing. We rely on those groups that would come for public hearings in the morning to say, "Look, Conservatives, NDP, we think the bill should be amended this way or that way." Well, we're going to have all of about three hours to put our amendments together and have them debated in the afternoon. It just shows the disdain that this government has for the process that should be in place. Reasoned amendments should be able to come forward, and they should be able to accept them and deal with them in a logical and reasonable fashion.

So it is without doubt that I cannot support this particular motion. I think it's poorly put forward, it's poorly

timed. Nobody in the public, outside of this debate and those listening to this debate, was aware or would be aware there were going to be any public hearings. I suspect come Thursday morning, when we are going to have these hearings from 9 to 10:25, an hour and 25 minutes, probably nobody will show up because they will have figured it out as well.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Done deal.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: You know, it's a done deal. This government isn't interested in legislating through the processes that we have here—the participation, the democratic rights of people to come forward and their piece about the legislation and put forward other suggestions. It continues to amaze me about this government. We put forward a motion, for instance, last week to have a committee that had five Liberals, five opposition and a Liberal chairman in place to hear—

Mr. Bob Delaney: On a point of order, Madam Chair: Pursuant to standing order 23(b)(i), my esteemed colleague on the opposite side seems to have strayed from his discussion of the topic of the bill. His discussion was interesting, and he seems to have drifted into a discussion of a motion already dealt with last week.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Thank you for the point. Again, the motion before us is the one that's being debated. I know that the member for Carleton-Mississippi Mills will be getting back to the motion that's on the floor. Thank you.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Madam Speaker, I'm using it as an example of the disdain of this government demonstrated in this motion—a disdain for hearing anything from the opposition and trying to retain control of the process from start to finish without any interruption. That's effectively what this motion does, Madam Speaker. I was saying that the whole idea of the Legislature, and what I think people out there would really like us to do in here, is to sit around after the government has made the proposal, have a reasonable discussion, come to a consensus of some sort with regard to the legislative matters—knowing that the government always has more votes than the combined opposition, but at least listening to some argument about the various pieces of legislation, the sections in those legislations, because notwithstanding the cynicism towards politicians, we all want to make a constructive effort to try to deal with laws and make them more reasonable for our citizens. That's what the process is supposed to be about. But as I mentioned before, when we tried last week to put forward an evenly structured committee, with the hammer quite frankly in the hands of the Liberal chairman, we didn't see any effort by this government to include opposition members of the Legislature, or frankly backbenchers, in trying to deal with our economic crisis. That's a much larger issue than the issue at hand with regard to Bill 114.

I think I have said my bit. Unfortunately, this is a very, very disturbing move on the part of the government to close this down, with one hour and 25 minutes of public hearings and probably 15 minutes of clause-by-clause—I don't think the opposition will be in a position to come

forward with reasoned amendments in the afternoon, three hours after there might have been some meaningful input from the public at large.

I conclude by saying I will not support this under any circumstances. This government is out of control with regard to making their will stronger and stronger. They seek more and more power in this place, and this is bad for all of Ontario, especially when we are in very difficult times. They should be opening up their hearts and their heads to all useful suggestions that are made here. I know they have to govern, but on this particular bill there's not a heck of a lot of urgency; therefore, they could have the time to listen thoughtfully, not only to us but to the public, pay attention and make their legislation better for all Ontarians.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos: I regret that the grade 5 students at Earl Beatty school had to move on. They are constituents of Michael Prue, who was prepared to take them through this motion exhaustively.

Let's understand why a government brings in this kind of motion. The motion has its roots in what I call the common law of time allocation, and it still exists. One can apply to the Speaker to shut down debate, prevailing upon the Speaker to determine that there has been exhaustive review or consideration of the matter at hand.

Speakers were loath to exercise that power—they were very, very cautious—because exhaustive debate implies a lot of things. It could mean that all the facets have been examined, or it could mean the opportunity for every member of this chamber to address an important and very fundamental issue in the province of Ontario, not for the purpose of being dilatory but because we have a crisis.

Recall October 22, when this bill, Bill 114, received first reading. It was the day of the interim economic report. People were hanging on by their fingernails across the province, expecting to hear some response to the crisis of joblessness, weren't they? We in the opposition were—how does one say it?—cautiously, oh, so cautiously, optimistic that the government would adopt some of the proposals that have been put forth. Lord knows, the government tried to explain to the public that it was reaching out and that it wanted to hear a thorough canvassing of all of the options. You see, when you debate a bill, the subject matter of that debate is not just what's in the bill; it's what's not in the bill.

So I take this a little personally, because I haven't had a chance to take my place here to address Bill 114 and what it purports to represent. I've got 800 John Deere workers down in Welland who were pink-slipped last month, and I take this personally, because I think those workers and their families have a right to have their interests spoken to. So why does the government move a time allocation motion? There could be a level of urgency. There could be a need to implement the policies promptly. So here, as we debate this motion that warrants the consideration of the contents of 114—urgency, you say? Urgency?

1400

The amendments to the Legal Aid Services Act, schedule K: Is there anything urgent about those? Is there a time frame in which they have to be enacted or else they lose their impact or significance? Of course not. The amendments to the Ottawa Congress Centre Act, schedule P: Is there an element of urgency there? It's changing the name from the Ottawa Congress Centre Act to the Ottawa Convention Centre Corporation Act. Please—urgency? I think not. Who would dare suggest there is urgency? Who would dare suggest that there's anything in this legislation that speaks to 800 John Deere workers down in Welland? Who would dare suggest that there's anything in this legislation that speaks to the workers at Abitibi in Thorold, who are all pink-slipped for the month of November? A whole plant, the month of November—gone. The timing is remarkable, isn't it, at a time when hard-working families are planning on maybe buying the family something special because it's Christmas time, to lose their paycheque for that month. Who would dare suggest that there's anything in the bill that speaks to those workers? Who would dare suggest there's anything in this bill that talks to the total of 1,300 jobs that have been eliminated at Sterling Truck in St. Thomas? Who would dare suggest that, let's say, the amendments to the Electricity Act—because I see the amendment here—that amendment speaks to the GDX Automotive workers in Welland? Three hundred jobs lost last month. Who would dare suggest that anything in this Bill 114, speaks to the 320 workers at PPG Canada in Mississauga and Owen Sound? Those jobs are gone.

Earlier today I was told that the Premier—our Premier, Mr. McGuinty—seemed somewhat pleased that Ontario had acquired have-not status. Pleased? Is that anything to celebrate? The McGuinty Liberals have dragged the economy to hell in a hand basket, and it's not over yet. Then they try to pretend that they want to hear from members opposite. How do they listen to members opposite when they shut down debate? Public participation in the committee is one of the most important things that happen here at Queen's Park, or in any assembly, for that matter. It really is. You've been involved in it. You have the folks out there, a whole lot of people who take a whole lot of time preparing very careful submissions in an effort to be of some assistance to a government, and then want their brief 10, 15, 20 minutes before a committee. Well, this government has ensured, with this legislation, that the committee—and you'll recall that it was the Premier who crowed about his finance committee. Mr. Prue will undoubtedly talk about this before these two hours are over.

The Premier is saying, "Well, no, this is the committee where you deal with these things." But what has the Premier done, what has Mr. McGuinty done to 13 million Ontarians and a quarter of a million workers whose jobs have been taken from them? He slams the door in their faces.

This motion doesn't just display contempt for this Parliament; it displays disdain for the working women

and men of this province. It displays disdain and disregard for seniors whose modest savings have been all but wiped out over the course of the last few months, after they were told they were doing the right thing by investing in what they were assured were relatively conservative mutual funds by any number of bank managers and financial advisers. This government shows disdain with this motion for young people in this province, who, notwithstanding the best education any generation ever got, don't have jobs to go to.

There was no mistake about the effort on the part of the government to link its ballyhooed economic statement of October 22 and this legislation, Bill 114, was there? Why, the finance minister, Mr. Duncan, was dressed in his finest—he's a fine dresser; far more expensive clothing than I have ever worn. I expect the accompaniments—the cuff links, the Rolex watches, the Mont Blanc pens—are far more expensive than anything I could ever afford. And those Prada shoes—I don't know what they are. I buy my boots from Elio's, down in Thorold—Canadian made, compared to the sweaters about which our Conservative colleagues blew the whistle on this government, the sweater purchase for Ontario Provincial Police officers.

Interjection: RCMP.

Mr. Peter Kormos: RCMP? The contract was stolen from a Kitchener company and its workers and sent to Mexico.

You see, I take this very personally. I wanted the modest opportunity that the debate around Bill 114 would have given me to talk about these very sorts of things, and the folks down where I come from expected me to have that time.

You heard Mr. Prue and others observe over and over again that there's nothing in Bill 114, nor in the economic statement that preceded it, that even spoke of, never mind to, poverty.

I've got folks down where I come from—and I think every member of this chamber has seen folks in their ridings—who are getting poorer as we speak, losing their jobs: the 500 jobs at Volvo in Goderich or the 2,000 jobs at Progressive plastics or the 400 jobs at Magna's Formet Industries factory in St. Thomas.

The fears—I read in the paper just today, "Ford Sales Down 25%." St. Thomas workers—I know those workers; I've been down there, and I have the greatest regard for the auto workers at the St. Thomas plant. I read just the other weekend in the New York Times that the city of New York is banning black cars, those limo-style cars, because they contribute too much to the carbon footprint in the city itself. I don't want to be the bearer of bad news, but you don't have to be a rocket scientist to know what's going to happen to that Ford Crown Vic/Mercury Marquis assembly line in St. Thomas.

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See, there were people here, hard-working members of the chamber—I suspect, in all three parties—who are convinced that Bill 114 was going to give them the chance to speak about those things on behalf of their con-

stituents; who believed—however naive it has become to believe this, to dare believe it—that they could contribute to the committee process by opening the doors to the committee process to their constituents, inviting people to come to Queen's Park, to come to Toronto, make a contribution and talk about Bill 114 and what it does—if they believe it does—or what it doesn't do to improve their lot in life.

An hour and 25 minutes for public hearings? Let's assume there are—help me with this—15 minutes per presentation. That allows five and a half presentations. Let's say there are minutes per presentation. That gives you eight and a half.

People thought they were going to get their say. The Premier says he wants to listen to the opposition and he is prepared to reach out. I'm prepared to say to you, Madam Speaker, that I expected to have the opportunity to point out that in Bill 114 there is not one, not a single one, of the very valid recommendations that the NDP had been, quite frankly, harping on, the kind of recommendations that could help save jobs, protect existing jobs, and, yes, maybe even restore some of the jobs that have been lost.

New Democrats expected to be able to speak to that. New Democrats expected to be able to sit in committee and make amendments to this legislation wherever it was possible so that there might be some consideration in that committee, because that's what the Premier said was supposed to take place. He didn't want to buy the proposal of Mr. Runciman and Mr. Hudak and the Conservatives, a multipartisan or tripartite committee. The Premier said, "No, it's in the finance committee that you do this stuff." We said, "Okay; fine." We live with the fact that we've got a majority that's prepared to use its brute force to shut down debate and to ram legislation through regardless of the ill effect it has on so many hard-working Ontarian folks.

For the briefest of moments, I believed the Premier when he said that the finance committee was where that stuff was going to take place. I thought Bill 114 was going to be the vehicle. I'm sorry if I was presumptuous. I apologize if I assumed too much, but I don't think I was alone, because the Premier said, "That's where you discuss these things—in the finance committee." We thought Bill 114 was going to be the vehicle, the medium, the process in which we could discuss those things; maybe about the process wherein we could propose an immediate increase in the Ontario minimum wage to help lift those workers out of poverty; maybe the place where we could talk about a strong, across-the-board, Buy Ontario policy, because, Lord knows, Bill 114 doesn't talk about it, does it?

My, how interesting. I wonder how interesting and how much impact a Buy Ontario policy would have had on John Deere's decision. They manufacture those little four-wheel motorized vehicles, the style that are used in all of our provincial parks and municipal parklands.

Mr. Bob Delaney: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: The member's discourse on this bill has been very edifying, but the policy merits of measures not in

the bill notwithstanding, I'd like to ask you to enforce standing order 23(b)(i) and to request that the member for Welland continue to enlighten us on the motion and not matters that were not considered in the original bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I thank you for the point. I have found that the member has been carefully coming back to the fact that the closure motion is before this House, and I ask the member for Welland to continue with this debate.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Speaker, I always appreciate your guidance and direction.

I value the Speaker's assistance and I value the efforts on the part of my colleagues to rein me in from time to time. Forgive me if I may be a little intemperate about some of this. As I said, I take it kind of personally. I really do. So I want to thank Mr. Delaney, the member for Mississauga—Streetsville, for whom I have a great deal of respect, for his support and his help and his assistance. I can only say to him that I look forward to the chance to aid him in kind, and I just hope I can muster up as much generosity as he's able to on a regular basis, and as much kindness and generosity of spirit.

The real insult here is the lip service to third reading. Many times, we vote for bills on principle on second reading, and then we look to committee as the venue in which to build them, to mold them, to a state where we can then support them, and if that isn't possible, we rely upon third reading. Third reading has become increasingly dismissed as some sort of "just hang on" nuisance. On the contrary, it's a very, very important function. There will be times, when there's all-party support for a piece of legislation, when third reading diminishes in its significance. But there will be other times, especially after the committee has met and dealt with the process there, when third reading becomes a very important stage of the legislative process, because it then is the opportunity for members to express, for instance, why they're not supporting a piece of legislation.

I apologize for having been simplistic about things from time to time during the last 20 minutes. I apologize for the concern I have for working families in this province. I apologize for doubting the Premier. But you see, none of those apologies change the reality for folks in Welland and Wainfleet and Port Colborne and Thorold and south St. Catharines, or anywhere else in the province for that matter, who are losing their jobs, losing their livelihoods, who are losing their futures, who will be losing their homes.

There are amendments to the Assessment Act here, but does any member here dare speak to the fact that any of those amendments help people keep their homes? No. Michael Prue and the NDP have come forward with an assessment policy that would do that very thing, and he may speak to it when he has his 19 minutes remaining. I hope he does.

I will not be supporting this time allocation motion, and I will be voting against it with as much vigour as I could possibly muster in my time here at Queen's Park.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on this motion. It's always exhilarating and daunting to speak after the member for Welland. I usually listen to him very carefully, in the hope that one day I will be as effective an orator as he is, but I'm sure time will teach me, and I'll learn from him as well, how to speak in this chamber.

The economy has been an issue which we all have been discussing for some time. We've been discussing the economy in the news on a daily basis for a few months now. It's a topic which has been discussed by the water coolers, by our friends, our family members, by our neighbours, and it is definitely a topic which has been quite extensively discussed and debated in this Legislature on a daily basis, a few times a day. It's an issue, I think, on which we have exchanged our ideas back and forth. We have agreed to disagree in many instances. We have outlined our positions and our strategies as to how we're going to grow and strengthen Ontario's economy, and some have highlighted some of the deficiencies in those strategies.

Up to last week, we were having quite an extensive debate on the economy, on a motion addressed exactly to that purpose, so that we can solicit ideas from all sides as to how we further strengthen our economy.

The government obviously has outlined its position, its belief in the five-point economic plan, as to how that will prove to be an economic stimulus to grow the economy in Ontario by investing in our skills and knowledge, investing in infrastructure, bringing business costs down and giving targeted business tax cuts. That is what the finance minister spoke about when he outlined the fall economic statement. So I think our positions are quite well known and this is the time, with this the upheaval, what we are living through. It's not the time to debate, again and again, the same issues; it's time to take action.

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That's why we, as part of the McGuinty government, are driven by the five-point plan we have implemented to make sure that we produce the results we are required to. We believe we can get through the implementation of that five-point plan, to keep building on the partnership we have developed in this province. The announcement made by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing on Friday is an indication of the partnership we have built between the provincial government and the municipalities, to make sure that we start the process of uploading those social services which were downloaded on the municipalities back in the 1990s, to make sure that the municipalities have the means to invest in their communities.

Those ideas and those strategies are there. We need to make sure that this House, collectively, moves forward and comes up with further concrete ways to grow this economy, and that debate will continue on in the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, not only in the context of Bill 114 but also in the context of the budget for 2009. There will be this extensive process by which the Minister of Finance will be travelling the

province doing public consultations as to what we should be looking at next in terms of growing this economy in 2009 and beyond—and not only the Minister of Finance, but also the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs will be holding their own public consultations, and that is a real opportunity for people across Ontario to come forward, give their views, comment on how the government has performed thus far and how we can continue to grow the economy.

For all those reasons, I'm in favour of this motion. I think we need to move on to make sure that we put in place the next milestones in building this great province of ours.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Hillier: I was expecting to speak to Bill 114, but of course, we're speaking to the time allocation, the closure, the silencing of debate on Bill 114 instead.

I want to make reference, first off, to the members from Carleton-Mississippi Mills and Welland for their honest and forthright expression of opinions and ideas about this closure of debate on Bill 114. I think it ought to be clear to everybody in this House, everybody throughout this province, that the most significant concern for the people of Ontario, the gravest concern for the people of Ontario, is our economy. That is beyond doubt, beyond question. I'm sure everybody in this House recognizes that the problems we're facing economically are significant and are overarching all other concerns.

Now, this main grave concern the Liberal government says ought not to be discussed in this House; it ought not to be discussed in public hearings. They are going to limit public hearings to one hour and 30 minutes on the gravest concern that this province is facing. These public hearings of an hour and a half are for an omnibus bill which takes into account 23 pieces of legislation, and they are going to allow one hour and 30 minutes of public hearings. That is unacceptable by any account. It is certainly intolerable in a democracy that we limit discussion and debate on an omnibus bill. On the greatest concern facing this province, we silence everybody.

I just want to put this in context for the members opposite who may not be aware. This Liberal government travelled the province, hosting hearings about Bill 50, the animal cruelty bill, and we spent hours of debate in the House. That was a priority for this government, and they spent significant amounts of time discussing it. We also spent significant amounts of time discussing a ban on light bulbs, a ban on cigarette displays, a ban on trans fats in junk foods and Facebook pages for MPPs. We spent all kinds of time discussing trivial, insignificant matters, and when there is a grave concern facing this government, they hide under a time allocation motion. That is unacceptable. It is intolerable. I have to ask the members opposite, do you really think you are providing value to your constituents when you silence opposition, when you silence debate, when you close off public hearings? Is that what you think is value to your constituents? We're facing a deficit, we're facing hundreds of thousands of

jobs moving out of this province, and we get smiles and smirks and silences and closures from this government. That is not acceptable.

This House derives its authority from the consent of our constituents. We have an obligation, when we derive that authority, to listen, an absolute and fundamental obligation to listen to and hear their concerns, not to silence their interests, their concerns or to silence the people who represent them.

We've heard the platitudes and the rhetoric of this government. We hear about openness, we hear about transparency, and we get the curtain of time allocations right afterwards. It's saying one thing and doing another once again. Here, in this time, we're facing debating this time allocation. The urgency: We can no longer spend any more time discussing this, according to the Liberal government, and where is the Premier? Where are the ministers? They're on a trip. I hope he's found the lost jobs that he went looking for when he went over to China, because that's where they are. That's not what we're discussing, though; we're discussing a limitation on debate on our economy.

I will be opposing this motion. I am sure all others who want to represent their constituents will look into the mirror, reflect on their obligations and oppose any measure to silence discussion and debate on this most important subject. It's bad enough that this motion has even come to the floor. We cannot allow it to continue. We need to have scrutiny on this bill, and it's not good enough that just the lambs want to be silenced on the other side.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Prue: I rise today, as I have every time that a government has imposed closure, in bewilderment. I rise in anger. I rise because I cannot understand why governments consistently do this when there is no necessity to accomplish this goal. I rose in anger when I was here for the first two years and saw Conservatives do it. I saw Liberals who sat on this side of the House denounce them each and every time the closure motion was brought forward. I watched them and I watched them, because I believed they were honestly trying to have fulsome debate in this House. Then, with the greatest of respect to Madam Minister over there, who continues to want to say something, but I can't quite hear you—

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Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: Now I watch for four years and a bit solid, where Liberals are standing up and doing the same things that they condemned the Conservatives before them for doing. They are standing up here, and they are using a closure motion, which is also known as a time allocation motion, a guillotine motion, in order to simply stop debate.

It's not me they're stopping from debate. I had the opportunity already; I had my one-hour leadoff. I have spoken to this bill. But I am standing up for all of the other members who have not had that opportunity. We have literally had a few hours of debate, that's all.

Now, lest anybody say we have to get on with this, this is probably the single most important thing that this government will introduce in this session. It involves, in schedule J, interim appropriations. That allows the government, between now and 2010, to raise whatever money the government deems fit. It allows them to raise and spend \$100 billion of taxpayers' money. You would think that members in this House would be given an opportunity to talk about the raising of \$100 billion or the expenditure of a \$100 billion, but thus is not the case. This government, through this motion, is attempting to ram this bill through this House.

I looked in sadness upon the motion itself. Look at what the motion does. It gives a scant two hours here today for members to stand up to either defend doing this or to rail against doing this, and then I'm sure the long arm of the 72 or so members of the government will stand up one by one in their place and say that there can be no debate on a \$100-billion budget, where the money comes from. There can be no debate on the Assessment Act. There can be no debate on commodity futures. There can be no debate on the corporate tax act, no debate on the Education Act, no debate on the Electricity Act—these are all contained within the body of the bill—no debate on the Executive Council Act, no debate on the Financial Administration Act, no debate on the Fuel Tax Act. There can be no debate on the Income Tax Act. There can be no debate on the Interim Appropriation Act, the Legal Aid Services Act, the Limitations Act, the northern services act, the capital growth corporations act, the Ottawa Congress Centre Act, and on and on and on.

There can be no debate, none at all, because on Thursday, without any notice whatsoever to the public, we are going to have a bill put before us in the finance committee, and we are going to have, I suppose if anyone is—I don't know. I don't want to suggest any motives of people, but if they're going to come forward, knowing that they're not going to be listened to at all or that what they say has absolutely no value to the committee, we are going to listen to six or seven people.

The reason that I say it has absolutely no value to the people who serve on the committee, and I am a member of that committee, is because of another provision of the bill. The bill says quite clearly that the amendments that are to be put forward to the committee have to be filed the day before. They have to be filed on November 5. That means that if any member in this House wants to put a motion before the committee to change an aspect of the bill, it has to be done before we hear the deputants.

So if the deputants come to us, all six or seven of them, what are they going to say? They're going to stand there and they're going to tell us something about which we can do nothing. If they come up with a really good suggestion for the bill and say, "If you move a couple of these words around or change this, it's going to help the government and help the bill and help Ontario and help the country," there's nothing we can do with it because the time to make the amendments will be passed. So when the government puts this forward, that amendments have to be in before you hear deputants, please tell the

deputants that you do not value anything they have to say because no matter what they say, no matter what good ideas, there is nothing we can do with it. I wonder why we're going to go out there and ask deputants to come forward. I have never before seen this on a bill. I have been here seven years, and I have never seen on a bill where amendments close before you even hear anyone speak to them. If the government can tell me why you're doing this, please stand up. I'm waiting for a government member to tell me why the amendments have to be put in before we even hear the deputants. I think this is abhorrent. I think this is totally wrong. I would suggest that if we are going to advertise, because usually we do advertise, asking if people want to come in, there should be a proviso that "You can come in and speak to us, but we're not going to listen, because we can't listen, because we can't do anything you're going to ask, because the decision will already have been made. You'll already have missed the time frame."

Is that what this government wants to do? That's what you're doing. That's what this is all about. The government members who are going to stand in their place here an hour from now are going to vote to have the amendments in before we even listen to anybody. They're all going to stand up—mark my words—in their place and do that. They're all going to applaud each other and pat each other on the back and say what a good job they've done and how they've invoked closure and, oh my goodness, "We don't really want to hear from anybody anyway but, wink, wink, nudge, nudge, we'll listen to you at another time."

If that wasn't bad enough, the closure, the clause-by-clause, will be dealt with at 2:30. That is a scant four hours after public debate. We're going to get 85 minutes on Thursday for public debate, but the motions already have to be made, and then we'll have to go into committee. So we will have heard from people who will have no idea what the government's motions are or the motions made by the opposition. We're going to go in there four hours later and we're going to debate those motions. The amendments, as I said before, will have already gone in before we've heard from the deputants.

This is a bill of some substance. It is 68 pages long. It is detailed. I believe it details 23 different acts and regulations; 23 things that raise everything from \$100 billion to the priorities and prerogatives of the cabinet, to the tobacco taxes, to commodities—everything that has to deal with the financial situation in this province. We're going to, I guess, pass it really quickly, because if we don't pass it really quickly, there is a guillotine motion inside of the committee itself. That is, if the committee can't deal with it in the scant couple of hours that it has left over from 2:30 until 5 o'clock, then everything is brought forward at 5 o'clock without debate and has to be voted on. So even if the members of the committee want to speak to the motions, even if they put forward motions that are not relevant to the people who have come to talk to us, you can't even debate those either because at 5 o'clock there's a guillotine motion inside the committee and everything is going to be voted on.

If that's not bad enough, and if the members opposite think that that's still a good thing, then I really got a chuckle out of the last one. This is Thursday at 5 o'clock. Every Thursday at 5 o'clock everything shuts down here. This House does not sit on Friday. All of next week it is remembrance week, and because it's remembrance week, this House will not be in session from the 10th until the 14th or 15th. We will not be in session. So what happens literally is that at 5 o'clock everything is rushed through, and then on the 17th the House comes back. But what they have stated in the motion itself is that if the finance committee cannot finish by 5 o'clock for whatever reason, then the motion is deemed to be passed. Well, we cannot meet. The rules of this House do not allow the finance committee to meet after 5 o'clock on Thursday, so even if we couldn't finish and even if we needed to finish, we can't finish. We can't. The motion you're putting forward will not allow the finance committee to finish, and the House is not in session on Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday or Sunday.

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I see the Chair of the committee here. He knows I'm right. He knows there is nothing we can do if for some reason we don't finish at 5 o'clock and it's deemed to have been passed. Then it's going to come back to the House on the 17th, deemed to have been passed by not listening to anyone, deemed to have been passed if the finance committee can't, in its ability, finish by 5 o'clock.

We're going to have a vote that's not going to be allowed to be debated, and then there's going to be one hour of debate here—one hour's debate in this House, split evenly among three parties. Each party is going to get 20 minutes to stand up and talk about who wasn't listened to, who wasn't heard, what ideas couldn't be put forward, what ideas and motions couldn't be voted on before 5 o'clock, whether or not the committee was able to meet, couldn't meet, couldn't finish, and then we're going to vote for it.

This is a \$100-billion budget—a \$100-billion budget. I don't know how the members in the Liberal Party can stand up and say this is a good thing. I haven't heard anybody say it's a good thing. I listened to a colleague, a relatively new member for Ottawa. He stood up and tried to give some defence that we've talked enough about budgets in this place. I'm not sure we've talked enough about budgets. We have not talked about the very real concerns of the people of this province.

I know I take my job here very seriously, and I believe all members take their job very seriously, to echo and speak about the concerns the members in their ridings bring forward. We have many avenues to do that. We can do that inside this Legislature; we can do that inside the committee; I guess we can do that through the newspapers and with the media through scrums. But the chief place where we need to do our work, I would suggest, is inside this Legislature.

This motion limits 107 members—excluding the Speaker, 106—to one hour of debate. That works out to

approximately 32 seconds each to talk about whether or not we think what is contained in this bill helps or hinders our constituents. It literally means that most members in this House—literally almost all the members of the House—will not have an opportunity to say what I believe needs to be said.

We have a bill and a motion before us that are both extremely flawed. But in terms of the motion, I do not understand—I know I cannot impugn motives, or impute motives either, about why the government might be trying to do this. I have looked at the order paper to see if there is a huge body of bills sitting out there waiting for us to work on. I have to tell you that there is almost nothing on the order paper. There are almost no government bills on the order paper. Instead, we are being brought back to put a guillotine motion to this so the government can pass this bill, supposedly to get on with other business. But I am perplexed; I am confounded to understand what bill is so important, what other bills are so important, that they have to come forward.

They are giving a scant one hour for debate when this comes back for third reading. That is about the same amount of time that is allocated for private members' bills. I am a great fan of private members' bills; I love them. I think that private members' bills give an opportunity to come up with unique ideas—

Mr. Peter Kormos: Or silly ones.

Mr. Michael Prue: Well, all right, whatever ideas they might have—that sometimes, even if not passed, find their way into government legislation. I was very pleased to see government legislation on the ban of cell-phone use, and I know that Mr. O'Toole, my colleague from Durham, tried for many years, only to see it finally adopted as a government bill. But at least the idea was adopted. But we give one hour for those bills. Those bills, as important as they are, are not the expenditure of \$100 billion this year and \$100 billion for appropriations for next year—it's so much money, and we can't even talk about it.

How can I go back to my constituents? How can I go back and say that I've tried to stand up for their interests when I have a government and a minister opposite who put forward a motion which won't allow for public debate, won't allow for public input, won't allow for opposition to put in motions in a timely manner, won't allow for the committee itself, of which I am a very proud member, to actually debate—if we go beyond 5 o'clock, it's killed—and then has the temerity, the unmitigated gall, in the end to stand up and say, "We will allow for one full hour of debate?"

It's a sad day. I feel very sad that the government is putting forward a motion. I feel very sad, because I remember in those days when I first came here some of the same government members, when they were in opposition, speaking with great eloquence about why ramming things through in a closure motion, a time allocation motion, a guillotine motion, was wrong. Some of the greatest debates that I've heard on that were from people who now occupy executive positions, who sit in the front

row in the benches opposite. I remember now—Minister of Transportation Bradley, who spoke so eloquently on this issue so many times. He railed so many times, but spoke very eloquently. I remember the now finance minister speaking about this issue so many times—about closure, when the former government had invoked it, and about why it should and ought not to be done in a parliamentary system like ours.

My colleague from Welland did say, is there an urgency here? Is there an urgency that the government coffers are going to run dry? Is there an urgency that there are so many other bills on the order paper that we have to deal with this now? Tell me, because if there is, I will accept that. If there is a rational reason why this has to be forced through in the way it is, if we're in a state of war, if something has to happen so rapidly that we have no other choice, tell me. I might even support you on the motion. But I haven't heard that. I haven't heard it from a single person. I haven't heard one single compelling argument that would cause me to think otherwise.

My time is just about up. I want the government members to think long and hard about this. I want them to think about this, because what you are setting here, if not a precedent, is at least an avenue that you seem all too willing to go down, for no real great cause. I know that past Speakers—and I've had the opportunity to be here through a number of them—have not allowed closure motions until seven, eight or 10 hours of substantive debate have gone by, when they would allow an ordinary member to stand up and say, "I think we've had enough debate. Let's vote." They have insisted on seven, eight or 10 hours. That is not what has happened here. This is a government that has not allowed those seven, eight or 10 hours to transpire before attempting to move on. This is a government that is attempting to use the might of its 72 members to stop anyone and everyone from saying what needs to be said.

I think it's a sad day for this Legislature and I will be voting against the motion.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I am delighted to be up, although just for a couple of minutes, to speak in support of this motion. Because I do have very little time to speak about this motion, I just wanted to highlight a couple of things.

One is that I've heard from the opposition about how terrible this allocation motion was, about the omnibus bill that it's perceived to be. I remember those days of omnibus bills when there were no committees; there were no discussions. I wasn't in this House but I was at the municipal level, where we felt the ramifications from those decisions made without consultations. But let me tell you: What I hear from my members in the constituency I represent is that they want this government to act, to act like we've been acting in the past, to do the things that they expect us to do.

I guess what I'm talking about here is, yes, there are a number of things outlined in Bill 114 that the motion attempts to address. Do we want to improve how one can

get granny flats to look after their loved ones? That's what they want to hear. They don't want to hear about us being here in this House to talk about every other issue on the planet but not really what's important to them. Do they want us to talk about what Bill 114 will do about reducing the burden of property taxes on seniors? That's what they want us to do, and that's what this motion tries to expedite, to make sure that we get those things done.

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Do they want to talk to us about extending the mineral tax exemption? That's what Bill 114 will do once we put measures. They don't want us just to be here to talk about blah, blah, blah, like I've heard today and days in the past. They want us to act, and that's what this motion will do. It will expedite and make sure that those services, those needs of Ontarians are met and delivered in a timely fashion.

I know that there are some other folks that want to talk about this, so I'm going to end right here. Thanks for the opportunity to speak, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased to be able to stand this afternoon—maybe I should say I'm disappointed to be able to stand this afternoon to talk about a time allocation motion on a bill that really and truly affects our budget, a budget that's close to \$100 billion now.

Really and truly, not a lot of attention has been paid to the fact that a lot of members want to speak to this legislation—not only now on second reading debate but also, of course, on third reading. When you read the motion, we're going to have one hour total time of third reading debate on this particular bill. It's beginning to be more like a banana republic every day. Quite frankly, it's disappointing to people—to the folks watching and also to our residents.

I listened with interest to the previous speaker, the member from the New Democratic Party, Mr. Prue, when he spoke on the bill. I felt that he brought some really good points out on the whole concept of time allocation. Our party—we're very interested in the budgets, we're very interested in budget bills, and I would consider this a budget bill. We actually refer to it as a deficit bill.

We're entering a time in our country, in our province and in the world when we have some very difficult economic issues to deal with. Sweeping something under the carpet at this particular time and hiding from the public on a bill like this is extremely disappointing. If there was ever a time when there should be a lot of opportunity for people to come here and voice their opinions, voice their concerns, give positive and constructive criticism on the bill—maybe there are ideas that the opposition and government members can come up with to help our economy.

I know just today the federal finance minister, Mr. Flaherty, and all the provincial finance ministers were meeting. We now know that the province of Ontario will receive equalization payments; I believe it's \$350 million

for year one. I listened to an interview with the federal finance minister. You've been screaming about it and now he has come through with the money. It looks like you're putting this province into such a position after raising taxes, after raising spending 41%, or \$29 billion, over the last five years—we now know this province can no longer sustain that.

Mr. Bob Delaney: On a point of order, Madam Chair: While respecting the ideological leanings of my colleague from Simcoe North, the matters he raises are not part of the bill under discussion.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Thank you for your point. I'll just remind members that we're talking about the closure motion. I expect that the member will come back to that point in his remarks.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Absolutely. I appreciate my colleague not wanting me to actually speak on the real problems with this government when it comes to their financing and the mess they've made of this province in the last five years.

This is a typical example. They inherited an economy, a very, very strong economy, at a \$67-billion budget at that particular time, and what have they done? You're running it into the ground—200,000 lost manufacturing jobs—and spending like wildfire in all different areas and absolutely no sanity amongst your spending.

Mr. Bob Delaney: On a point of order, Madam Chair: Pursuant to standing order 23(b)(i), I'd like to remind my colleague from Simcoe North, through you, that he is drifting further from, and not closer to, the topic of the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Thank you for the point. I would ask the member for Mississauga—Streetsville to leave the decisions of whether or not this member is expected to get back to the motion on the floor to the Speaker.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I find it amazing, after listening to the first speaker from the government, who was not even talking about the time allocation motion, that now I'm out of order.

I applaud him for his efforts, because you know what? He's embarrassed to be on that side of the House. He'd like to be over here listening to people who make sense about this, instead of this pathetic—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I would ask the member from Simcoe to please keep in mind that all the members have been careful to come back to the motion that we are debating today, and I'd only ask you to do the same thing as I have asked—and other members have asked as well—to ensure that we are paying attention to the standing orders, which say that we should be debating what is on the floor.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Okay. So I guess I'll talk about the third reading debate. We're going to get one hour to debate this under this motion. You know, the finance minister himself, when he orders his \$90 steak dinners at the expense of the taxpayer, the reality is, it takes him more than an hour to eat the steak. And the reality is—

Mr. Bob Delaney: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: Respecting the feelings of my colleague from Simcoe North, standing order 23(h) prohibits the making of allegations against another member and 23(i) prohibits the imputing of false or unavowed motives to another member.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I thank the member for the points. I would ask the member for Simcoe North to please focus his attention on the motion that was brought forward by the Minister of Agriculture. It's a closure motion. It does speak to a particular bill. I have been allowing some discussion about the bill in the context of the motion, but it is a motion for closure that we are debating and I would ask the member to please stick to that.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Okay, so we will call it a Hugo-Chávez-banana-republic time allocation motion, where we spend almost no time debating a piece of legislation that affects the citizens of the province.

It's pathetic to see these points of order called on someone who's trying to make sense of this, when we see the complete waste of taxpayers' dollars that are being affected by this. They do not want to hear the truth.

The truth of the matter is they inherited a strong economy, a very strong economy, and they have wasted money left, right and centre. How many ways can I tell you they've wasted money? I guess I am out of order to actually point out how many ways they've wasted money. But this little booklet here from the Ministry of Tourism would be one.

I can go on and on and on with how we've wasted money. We do not need to limit debate on a motion because they are embarrassed by the fact that a time allocation motion is stopping the members of this House, including their own members—I can see the embarrassment on their faces—from actually speaking about something that affects all Ontarians. I believe there are 28 bills affected by the deficit bill, as we call it, and the reality is that hardly any of them have been discussed. There are only a few people who have had an opportunity to speak on this particular bill.

So when we move forward with this—you know, they complain; the government members like to think that they're on some glorious trip—the reality is, they want out of this House. As the member from Beaches—East York mentioned earlier in the time allocation motion, they simply do not want to be in this House to face the facts. The reality is, the province of Ontario, our country, the world, is facing difficult economic times. This is the time we should be in this House debating these things, not trying to find a way to hide and get out of here. The third reading debate, the time allocation motion: They're all down to a few minutes now. Why are we even here?

That's why I say that this bill reminded me of a banana-republic type of bill. It's like these countries where the one party wins all the seats. That's the type of thing we're seeing here today. I can remember that when this government took power in 2003, they used to have 30 or 40 members in here. Now they're having a hard

time getting anybody to come into the House anymore, because they're so embarrassed, particularly about the economic policies of this government. And nothing ever has been as pathetic as this government notice of motion on time allocation to limit debate on such a very important topic.

So as we move forward, I would like the general public to know how much money has been wasted by this government in all the different ministries, yet I have just had three appointments today with people from the correctional industry who've got very, very strong concerns about how that whole industry is falling apart. It's completely falling apart and this minister will do nothing about it, because he's more inclined to do fancy photo ops around a tiger or a lion on a zoo bill, or that type of thing, as opposed to actually getting out there and doing the job of the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

So although we have an opportunity here to actually get something accomplished on behalf of the citizens of the province of Ontario, what are we accomplishing? Nothing. We're having debate limited on something that's very, very important, the economic statement for the citizens of the province of Ontario, and I find it awful.

I will not be supporting this motion. I hope every opposition member, and even the government members who are not too embarrassed with this government, will actually sit back and support the government on—voting this motion down.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate? There being no further debate, Madam Dombrowsky has moved government notice of motion 88. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

I believe the ayes have it.

Call in the members. There will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1502 to 1512.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia
Albanese, Laura
Arthurs, Wayne
Balkissoon, Bas
Bentley, Christopher
Brown, Michael A.
Brownell, Jim
Colle, Mike
Craitor, Kim
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dombrowsky, Leona
Duguid, Brad
Fonseca, Peter

Gravelle, Michael
Hoy, Pat
Jaczek, Helena
Kular, Kuldeep
Lalonde, Jean-Marc
Leal, Jeff
Levac, Dave
Mangat, Amrit
Matthews, Deborah
McMeekin, Ted
Meilleur, Madeleine
Milloy, John
Mitchell, Carol
Moridi, Reza

Naqvi, Yasir
Oraziotti, David
Ramal, Khalil
Ramsay, David
Rinaldi, Lou
Sandals, Liz
Sergio, Mario
Smith, Monique
Sorbara, Greg
Sousa, Charles
Takhhar, Harinder S.
Van Bommel, Maria
Zimmer, David

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): All those opposed to the motion will please rise one by one and be recorded by the Clerk.

Nays

Bailey, Robert
Bisson, Gilles
DiNovo, Cheri
Dunlop, Garfield
Elliott, Christine
Gélinas, France
Hampton, Howard
Hardeman, Ernie

Hillier, Randy
Hudak, Tim
Jones, Sylvia
Klees, Frank
Kormos, Peter
MacLeod, Lisa
Martiniuk, Gerry
Miller, Paul

Munro, Julia
O'Toole, John
Prue, Michael
Runciman, Robert W.
Savoline, Joyce
Scott, Laurie
Sterling, Norman W.
Tabuns, Peter

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 41; the nays are 24.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

WORKPLACE SAFETY
AND INSURANCE
AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LA SÉCURITÉ PROFESSIONNELLE
ET L'ASSURANCE CONTRE
LES ACCIDENTS DU TRAVAIL

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 30, 2008, on the motion for second reading of Bill 119, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 / Projet de loi 119, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Interjections.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I have the floor, Minister. Sorry. Can we talk in 10 minutes? Thank you very much.

The business that we do in this House is always amazing, trying to do things in between debates.

As we were saying earlier, this particular bill moves in order to try to bring people in the construction industry under the Workers' Compensation Act and, for that, generally we're in support on the New Democratic side of the bench, but the point that I was making the other day when we first started this debate is that this bill really doesn't do what it intends to do within the life of this Parliament. You've got to ask yourself the question: To what degree is the government actually engaged in this process or committed to this process of making sure that these workers actually are covered by the Workers' Compensation Act? By the time the workers who are now excluded become included and covered by the Workers' Compensation Act, it won't be until 2012.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Order.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I still have the floor. Thank you.

So you ask yourself the question: If a government introduces a bill in the House in this particular session during this Parliament, you would think that the government would basically make the bill become law and make it take effect some time within this Parliament. This bill is now being debated in the current form that it's

written right now. If the bill should pass second and third readings, and I have to presume it will, no worker in this province that is mentioned in this bill under workers' compensation rules will actually be recognized until after the life of this Parliament.

We all know there's going to be an election in October 2011. We have a defined date when it comes to when elections happen in this province. This government is putting it off to the next government to basically deal with this issue, because the bill will become law and it will basically cover workers now excluded under the Workers' Compensation Act only after this particular Parliament is over.

So I say to the government across the way: How seriously do you take your responsibility to cover workers who are currently excluded from the act at this point? I've got to say, I don't think that they take it very seriously. This is a question of the government saying, "Oh, we love injured workers. We really love those people in the construction trades. We really want to be nice to you. Come over here so we can chat with you, hug you and hold you close here in the Liberal Party." But once you basically back away from the embrace, you find out that in fact the Liberal government is not serious about doing anything in the life of this Parliament. So I say, shame on this government for saying it's going to do one thing and then leaving it to the life of another Parliament in 2012 to deal with—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Can I please ask the members to be respectful? A member has the floor and is trying to participate in the debate on the next order of the day, which was just called by the government.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I was just mortified that they weren't listening. I'm going to have to say it all over again.

I just made this point. I've only got six minutes and there are a few other things I want to say particular to this bill. But I say, shame to this government, because what they're trying to do is to say, "We care about injured workers and we're going to make sure those injured workers who are now excluded from the coverage of the Workers' Compensation Act in the construction trades will be covered," but when you look at the fine detail of the bill, none of these workers will be afforded that right until 2012.

It also excludes people in the rescon industry, or the residential construction industry. We still have a huge gaping hole as to who is actually going to be covered under workers' compensation.

Now, why is this a problem? It's a problem for a number of reasons, but we would know, Madam Speaker, as constituency people. Most members in this House, and certainly yourself, myself and my colleagues in the New Democratic caucus, deal with a lot of workers' compensation claims within our constituency offices. One of the issues we often have is that somebody comes in to see you who says, "I have an injury." Let's say my person

has an ankle injury, as an example. I'm actually dealing with this particular case in my constituency office as we speak. An injured worker comes in to see us some time last spring, says he has an injury and that he is needing medical aid from workers' compensation so that his brace and the medication that he takes to deal with the pain around his ankle and the injury be covered by workers' compensation, and when he needs to take a day off or two days off to travel to go see a specialist, the Workers' Compensation Board pay for that lost time in order to go see the specialist because, currently, he is not being paid and has not lost any time other than the time he has gone to see his doctor. The problem that he has—he was working in the construction trades when he was originally injured. He was working for a contractor—well, actually, a smaller contractor—that didn't provide him with workers' compensation benefits.

1520

So here lies the problem: For all intents and purposes, the Workers' Compensation Board is saying, about this recurrence of the original injury, "It's a pre-existing condition." Therefore, they're having problems trying to determine how much of the problem with this gentleman's ankle has to do with the second injury and how much has to do with the original injury that happened under the employer where there was no workers' compensation that was paid to the Workers' Compensation Board.

This huge process of appeal that we're going through right now is to deal with his injury as related to what he has to live with now; it's not just what's happened to his injury at the second occurrence. We're trying to get him covered under those grounds, but the Workers' Compensation Board says, "No, no, no. There's a pre-existing injury. So therefore, we're saying that it has everything to do with the pre-existing injury."

We've won these cases in the past from time to time, but it takes a lot of work on the part of your staff and others in order to move forward to get such a claim covered. That's why it's important that all workers—not just the workers named in this bill, but all workers; in the banking industry and others—should be covered by the Workers' Compensation Act, because it is a clear right for workers to be able to go to work in the morning, to expect to have a safe day's work and that their employer provides a safe workplace. But in the event that there is an accident, he or she, as workers, should be guaranteed that they will at least be covered by workers' compensation should they be injured, no matter where they work.

Does this bill do that? No. It certainly moves the yardstick forward, but it leaves many, many workers far short of where they need to be when it comes to coverage under the Workers' Compensation Act.

So I say that although this bill is a step in the right direction, it really doesn't afford all workers in the province of Ontario the ability to be covered by workers' compensation, number one; and number two, this particular bill also doesn't become law—well, it actually

becomes law, but the full effect of getting workers covered, because of what is contained in this bill, and the policies of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, make it that it won't take full effect until 2012.

On the other argument, the Conservative caucus argues that this is going to cost employers lots of money. Let me just tell you: I've dealt with lots of contractors in my area, specifically in the forest industry, who themselves are self-employed contractors—the person owns a truck or a de-limber or some piece of equipment. They would love to be able to opt into the workers' compensation system because it would be cheaper than buying individual insurance to cover themselves should there be an accident while they're working with their truck or with their de-limber or whatever it might be. So, to the Conservative caucus, which argues, "Oh, this is going to cost business lots and lots of money": Listen, this is an issue which is already costing business lots of money. I know of many contractors in the area that I cover, in Timmins–James Bay, who are employed in the forest industry, and some in the mining industry, who are self-employed contractors who can't get workers' compensation and have to buy it by way of private insurance.

The public sector is much better able to deliver the product, as far as quality and costs go, under WSIB than you could under the private system. Many of the people that I've represented who are independent contractors have often argued that there should be an ability to opt into the workers' compensation system; it should be automatic.

To the last point, I would say that this bill, although it is a step in the right direction, certainly doesn't go to where we need to be, which is complete coverage of the Workers' Compensation Act for all workers in the province of Ontario.

If we were really serious, we would make sure that this bill becomes law now, and that the policies set forward be enacted so that all workers in this province could be covered by workers' compensation, and not this great big group-hug that the Liberals are trying to give the building trades, which says, "Not until 2012," and many workers in this province are still going to be excluded at the end of this process.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments? The member for Brant.

Mr. Dave Levac: Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity.

There is a typical response in a two-minuter, but what I'd like to do is maybe set some questions in motion for the member from Timmins–James Bay, who articulately expresses why it's important for this type of legislation to exist.

The first question I'd like to ask him is: I didn't hear it outright, but maybe he is implying that they won't be supporting the bill because it doesn't go far enough, or is it because it won't be enacted until 2012? I'd like him to see, if he does want to support the bill—I get a sense that they do. I get a sense that they do support the bill, as they

do see it as another step in the right direction, in terms of protecting labourers on construction sites.

The second question I want to ask him is, does he agree with us in terms of where the positioning was with WSIB, that we need to move the bar further and that we do? If we're being asked and challenged to choose between the possible cost increase for the small contractors out there, compared to the safety of somebody's arm or ankle—I think he referred to one of his constituents as having an ankle issue. We're looking at the safety of all workers first, and then we debate how we can implement corrections in the system in order for small businesses to survive and sustain themselves in competing. I think I also heard in one of his previous discussions on the bill that he felt the level playing field was an important aspect of the construction site industry. So when you're competing, you're comparing apples and oranges and not letting people win contracts because they have less cost because they're not providing WSIB. I would wonder if he could make a comment on that.

In essence, what I think I'm hearing the members say is that they do like the idea that we're moving the bar toward encompassing and grabbing more construction site workers and providing them with safety, providing them with a better avenue to collect WSIB. I'd like them to maybe comment on that.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: This bill is not only ill conceived, but the timing of it couldn't be worse. As you know, Ontarians are facing massive job losses. It's hard not only to put bread and butter on the table but to pay mortgages. At a time when we should have been celebrating Small Business Week, the Liberals brought in the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, Bill 119, which will effectively impose a new tax that will cost small construction companies as much as \$11,000 per year.

Landry Mechanical Services Ltd. in my community, in Nepean–Carleton, in the village of Kars, wrote to me: "We are a small construction firm and find it very difficult to make ends meet these days and even more difficult to make a profit. Putting a bill through making it mandatory for my husband and I to have WSIB coverage is ludicrous. Not only would it cost us for something we would never use, but it would put an even further financial burden on the company. We have owned our company for over 25 years and have never claimed anything from the government. We employ people steadily and add to the economic growth in our community." That's signed by Mrs. Barbara Landry, who's the secretary-treasurer of Landry Mechanical Services.

This Legislature should be supporting people like the Landrys who are creating wealth in our community, who believe in self-reliance and who believe in helping their community. Instead, in Small Business Week, when we in this Legislature ought to have been thanking people like the Landrys, the Liberals thought to penalize them. Instead of levelling the playing field, this bill will tilt the

playing field in favour of big unions and big businesses. That's not the Ontario that we're fighting for.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Kormos: Of course, the member for Timmins–James Bay has accurately presented the position of the NDP caucuses in several respects. One is that, first and foremost, we believe that every worker in this province, every single worker, should be entitled to WSIB workers' comp coverage. It's inconceivable that there are workers who put themselves at great risk on a daily basis who don't have WSIB coverage. In other words, they can't access that insurance program in the event that they are injured, either temporarily or permanently. Furthermore, it's unacceptable that there's any worker in this province who doesn't have the services of the WSIB in terms of monitoring workplaces and worker education in those workplaces.

I challenged the minister the other day, because this proposal is fairly easy. I'm going to have a chance to speak to it in a few minutes' time because I do have some concerns about parts of the bill. Those are concerns that I trust will be addressed in committee. But look, I say to the minister, this is easy. Why don't you take on the banks and financial institutions? Bring their workers into workers' comp. You see, this bill is a reflection of the principle, as it is with any public insurance pool, that the more people there are participating in that risk pool, the less the cost will be per person and the more effectively you can administer the program, and also, the more effectively you can engage in preventive work, because it allows you to identify unsafe workplaces and trends or workplace activities or workplace practices that contribute to workplace injuries. I'm going to have a chance to speak to that in a few minutes' time, after the member for Timmins–James Bay has responded to these various comments.

1530

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I listened to my colleague from Timmins–James Bay.

Prior to 2003, I worked for a small company in Peterborough, and I was actually their workplace health and safety officer, so it gave me the opportunity to work with WSIB individuals, the Ministry of Labour, and the owners of the Coyle Packaging Group to make sure that that particular workplace was as safe as possible.

One of the things I used to hear as a city councillor, and you'd appreciate this, Madam Speaker, is when small companies were making bids for municipal contracts, tenders, particularly for roofing contracts—and in any municipality you have libraries, you have museums, you have recreational facilities, that have roofs that need to be repaired. The municipality would send out the tender documents, and there would be a whole number of replies to those tender documents. From time to time, I would hear from companies that lost the tender, and they knew very well that somebody else had lowballed their

tender process because they probably were not paying WSIB. So one of the things that I believe might help, particularly, those small roofing contractors is that everybody will be paying the WSIB premiums, which will make their tenders much more transparent and put them on a very even basis, which I think is important. Municipalities do a lot of small contract tendering, and for a company to win that tender is quite a coup because that gives them confidence to apply for other jobs down the road and gives them a reputation of doing a particular job in the workplace.

Certainly with Bill 119, this is one area that I think will be corrected through that process. Ultimately this bill will go to committee; there will be presentations made. So I think it's a positive step forward—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Member for Timmins—James Bay, further response.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I want to thank the members for contributing in response to my comments.

I would say to the member from Peterborough, as somebody who has worked on health and safety and represented workers before, that would mean, I would hope, that we in the New Democratic caucus and workers in this province can expect amendments from you that will allow you to fix some of the problems with the bill, namely that we extend those rights to all workers in the province of Ontario. It should not just be specific workers, and I'll speak to that in a second—but also, the whole issue of making this happen only in 2012. Either we support the concept of extending these rights to workers in the construction trades or we don't. And if we do, it should be straight up, straight down, we allow this to happen within the life of this Parliament.

It's becoming more normal around this place that the government makes announcements that basically have nothing to do with this Parliament. We see it in this bill: 2012. The municipal upload to reload the download, is now, what, 2018? This government is making all kinds of promises that they will never be beholden to because they won't be the government by the time all of this stuff happens.

So I look forward to amendments from the member from Peterborough, or at least the support of our amendments, in order to make sure that we afford workers in this province the right to workers' compensation and that we move the date from 2012 to an earlier date.

To the member from Welland, he's right: One of the issues is, the more workers who are insured under workers' compensation, the more we're able to share the costs throughout the system, which means, overall, they go down for people. It's a very simple concept. If you have 10,000 people in the pension plan versus 100,000 people in the pension plan or an accident plan, you're able to share the costs and you're able to distribute the costs onto more people, which means your premiums have to be less. Just because you have more people in doesn't mean that all of those people will be injured all of a sudden and it's going to cost us more money. So we need to see this as a savings to the business sector, as

well as affording injured workers the right to get workers' compensation, something they should all be allowed in this province no matter where they work.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. David Zimmer: I'm happy to speak to this bill again. I spoke a couple of days ago. It seems that there is a lot of misinformation floating out there in the debates, in the public and in the media on what this bill is all about. What I want to do is try and nail down some of the facts: what the bill is and what the bill isn't.

Let me begin with the purpose of the bill. There are a lot of points of view around here and some people are for it, some people are against it, but under the current system, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, or WSIA as it's known, coverage is mandatory for workers in the construction industry. Independent operators, sole proprietors, partners in partnerships and officers of the corporation, they're not automatically covered under the existing scheme. So what's going to happen? Well, if this bill is passed, the act will be amended and it will specifically extend mandatory coverage to independent operators, sole proprietors, partners in a partnership and executive officers.

Now, there is one exemption and it's an important exemption. The exemption would be provided for home renovators who work exclusively in home renovation. They're the people that a family—husband, wife, bachelor—engages to come and do a kitchen renovation, put in kitchen cupboards or put in a new shower, that sort of small home renovation that often the homeowner contracts directly with the renovator. So that exemption will be in place for home renovation when the independent contractor is retained or hired directly by the occupier of the existing premises. So if I've got a house here in Toronto and I own the house and I want to put a new bathtub in, I can hire someone and I don't have to worry about the stuff that we're talking about today; that relationship is exempt.

What has happened in the past is a couple of things. A prevalent practice in the construction industry has been for individuals to declare themselves independent operators and decline optional Workplace Safety and Insurance Board coverage. So what do we mean by that? Well, someone who wants to get a piece of construction project done approaches a construction company. The construction company puts in a bid. They say, "We're going to do the work." They then go out and hire some workers. Here's the mischief: That company says to the workers, "Look, I'm going to sign an agreement with you, and you're not going to be an employee of mine. You're going to be an independent contractor."

I've seen examples of this in the summer where university and high school students go out and sign up for a construction project—building a cottage or something—in the summer. I've heard some specific examples of that and the contractor says to the kid, the employee who is sawing the boards, putting up the framing or doing construction work around the place, "We're going

to set it up so that in our relationship, you're an independent contractor and I'm going to pay you a bulk sum of money. I want you to say that you're an independent contractor." He does that so he doesn't have to pay the WSIB premiums that would normally accrue to that employee.

So now fast-forward. What happens? You know, usually—and here's where the real mischief is—a lot of times these people are forced into those relationships, in effect, because it's a summer job and they need the summer job, or often it's a new immigrant who has just arrived in Canada, needs some work desperately and signs on as an independent contractor, not covered by WSIB benefits and fast-forward—there's a job site accident. The student falls off the building and breaks a leg. The new immigrant worker saws off a few fingers, and because he's an independent contractor, he has no coverage. That person is on his own. What they say then is, "Don't look to WSIB. Don't look to any of the programs, coverages, rehabilitation and income protection and all of that sort of stuff that the WSIB provides. You're on your own and if you haven't got your own insurance plan in place, well, too bad. That's a part of the risk of being an independent contractor."

Then what happens, the summer student, the immigrant who has taken the job—often their first job in Canada—are in effect left holding the bag. They're treated differently than someone else who is on the job site with them, or maybe on the job site next door, who has been working with an employer who very conscientiously put the person on the payroll and very conscientiously and fairly has said, "You must be covered on WSIB. I will arrange that coverage. We will report you as an employee." That person has played by the rules. What happens, if that person has suffered an injury, is that they are entitled to all of the benefits and protections that WSIB provides—rehabilitation programs, retraining, income protection and all of that.

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So now we have two classes of employees. We have a class of employee, a class of worker, who has been caught up often in a relationship that is, in effect, imposed on them. The fact of the matter is that they haven't had a lot of choice: "You want the job? You are going to be an independent contractor. Go there and work." That's unscrupulous. We have other workers who are hired by responsible companies that are doing what they should do. They report the employee, they put the employee on the WSIB roster, and that person is treated differently. As I've said, accidents, income protection follows, training programs and all of that.

It's not fair to have two classes of employee, especially when one class of employee is vulnerable: the student who needs a summer job, the laid-off person who quickly needs a job because they have been laid off and they need that money coming in, the new immigrant who is looking for a very first job to get a toehold in our local economy.

So what happens next, then, once we've created this differential relationship between the two classes of

employees, those covered and those not covered? We've created an underground economy. There's a whole world out there of construction relationships where the employer and the so-called independent contractor are operating under the radar screen. We want to bring those people who don't have that coverage into the system.

Now, there have been some arguments advanced that this is a bad time to bring this kind of legislation in because of the economic downturn; that it's going to place a burden on these employers who are not properly reporting and now have to report and of course they will pay the premiums and all of that sort of stuff. Well, the flipside of the argument is, in a downturn in the economy, what we really want to do is protect those responsible, viable businesses that are playing by the rules, because right now we have a playing field that is not level. A contractor, an employer, who is playing by the rules is paying the premiums and paying that extra expense and of course has to build that into his cost structure. He is often competing against a contractor not playing by the rules, not covering those employees and not making those extra payments which would protect the employer. So that person is able to, in effect, put in a lower bid on a construction project. But just to address that economic argument again, this is going to make a level playing field. So that contractor who is playing by the rules and who is conscientious about his responsibility to his employee is going to be in a better position now when bidding on contracts because he's not bidding against someone who has a lower cost structure. So that, in my view, is only going to strengthen and enhance our economy.

You know, the people we don't want to drive out of business are the responsible employers who are doing the right thing by their employees and covering them with the WSIB benefits. In the long run, a safe environment for employees, proper methods of compensating them and retraining them if there is an accident and so on—that's what's good for the economy. What's not good for the economy is taking a class of employees and allowing them to be taken advantage of. That's why this is a good piece of legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: I appreciate the thoughtful intervention by the member from Willowdale. I know he talked about helping out business, the ones that abide by the rules and so forth, but it brought to mind the importance of thinking about the workers. Sometimes we take for granted that these workers we're talking about in construction sometimes do the most dangerous of jobs in the most incredible conditions. They're climbing on roofs and scaffolding, and they're in ditches.

In terms of the historical perspective here, one of the reasons that there's been such advanced labour protection in Ontario is the pioneering work from people like Frank Drea.

Madam Speaker, maybe you're not aware of Frank Drea; he was a crusading reporter for the Toronto Tele-

gram who changed his whole attitude towards worker safety as a result of the Hoggs Hollow cave-in. They were digging out for the Yonge Street subway, and six immigrant workers were killed in the Hoggs Hollow cave-in, working hundreds of feet underground with very little protection. It was after that we had some pretty strong legislation here in Ontario to ensure that we don't take our workers for granted.

This legislation before us is really an extension of that legacy that Ontario has, because we feel we have an obligation to those workers. As the member from Willowdale said, in many cases these workers in construction are new immigrants or students, people who sometimes take the dirty jobs and the dangerous jobs. So not only do we have to look at it in terms of levelling the playing field for the companies, but we also have to think of the fact that if these workers get hurt on that job—if you hurt your back, you can't make a living. You can't put food on the table, maybe for years to come, because that's your trade. So we're not talking about an office job; we're talking about heavy-duty work here.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Again, my party, the Progressive Conservative Party, will not support any new taxes or premiums on the people of Ontario. Unfortunately, this piece of legislation is going to cost some small construction companies as much as \$11,000 per year. As opposed to levelling the playing field, as I mentioned, all they are going to be doing is tilting it in favour of large unions and large companies. Legislated mandatory WSIB coverage will not serve to promote health and safety in the construction industry, but it will increase underground economic activity in the residential construction sector.

May I read into the record a letter I received from Merv McBride, in my constituency. He says to me: "I am sure you are aware of the legislation being forced through Queen's Park in regard to mandatory coverage for independent contractors in the construction industry.... As you will read, this legislation will affect my business negatively and unfairly." He agrees with Judith Andrew at the CFIB.

I also received a letter from Lagois Drafting and Construction Inc. quality designers and builders, on Prince of Wales Drive in North Gower, also in my riding.

What's troubling with this legislation is that they're trying to penalize small business. What bothers me most—and this should be a concern to every rural member in this Legislature—is that three construction firms in rural Ottawa are opposing this legislation just today. I will not stand for it. I will oppose this, and I hope they do not decide to force closure on this bill. I hope that they allow small construction companies across Ontario the opportunity to speak to this legislation. It is bad for this province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Kormos: Well, if you heard Mr. Zimmer, the member from Willowdale, as I did, you know now

why when he stands up to speak, I pause and listen, almost inevitably. Because I found that to be a thoughtful and careful analysis of the legislation. By God, Mr. Zimmer actually read the bill—a remarkable event in this Legislature, let me tell you. Secondly, Mr. Zimmer made his comments upon reflection, not having been scripted; again, a remarkable event—increasingly so—in this chamber.

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I will have the chance to speak to this for my modest 20 minutes as the afternoon rolls on. But I appreciate that Mr. Zimmer identified some issues with the bill that will have to be addressed at committee. I look forward to committee on this bill and to Mr. Zimmer's participation in that. The Liberal bench would be well served to have him sit on that committee, and I know that Mr. Zimmer wouldn't mind assuming that additional responsibility, already being parliamentary assistant to the Attorney General. I know that Mr. Zimmer will look forward to sitting on that committee.

There are some confusing and interesting contradictions in the legislation that I will question when I get the opportunity to speak to it. Having said that, once again New Democrats believe that every worker in this province—it's just plain good social policy—should have access to workers' compensation coverage, bar none, including small contracting people and their employees.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Dave Levac: Once again, I appreciate the opportunity. The member from Willowdale gave us an analysis of the bill that was articulate and thoughtful, and he tried to explain clearly the scope of this particular piece of legislation that stays within the realm of the construction industry. I think that's important to point out here. Some people seem to be getting well beyond that and trying to say there's a slippery slope here and that there's an intention of doing all these things. The NDP wants us to do that, and I don't doubt for one minute that that's what they're asking for; they've articulated that quite clearly.

I think a question needs to be asked here, and I know the member from Willowdale will make every effort to answer this; that is, to try to see if there's a balance between what is being proposed and what some people are saying are the absolute negatives of this particular piece of legislation. The question I have is, at what price? We've been told that the Progressive Conservative Party across the way has said it's not on. They've decided that, whatever their calculations are, that's the cost and it's not going to be met; therefore, they're against the bill. I would like them to ask whether they want to have a discussion with somebody who has lost a leg or an arm or half their face or, as the member from Timmins—James Bay explains, in terms of the difficulties faced by some members of WSIB, whether or not they can have their injury taken care of. Are there people who need that coverage?

Quite frankly, what the member from Willowdale is talking about is that we're trying to see if we can find

that balance in this piece of legislation. I suspect we're probably getting close to it, because in this place I've learned that if the NDP is against it—they're not saying they're against it, by the way; I have to be factual here. They haven't said they're against it, but if they're iffy about it and the Tories are saying no and we're saying yes, we've probably found the middle ground and we're probably right. I want to thank the member from Willowdale for bringing that to our attention.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The member for Willowdale for a response.

Mr. David Zimmer: At the end of the day, the bill is about three things. First of all, it's about fairness. It's about fairness to employees, so that we don't have this differentiation of employees. We have employees who are doing the same work, the same class of work and we have a group of employees who are better paid, in the sense that if something goes wrong and there's an injury and so on, they've got greater security. They've got the security of WSIB income protection, retraining, safety programs—all of that. That's a huge advantage. That's a huge asset that an employee has. If you're not covered, you lose all of that. There are two people doing the identical job. It's about fairness; it's about treating those two employees equally.

Lastly, I just want to come back to this business about the economic argument that somehow, in trying economic times, we're going to drive the economy into the ground. If you think about that, what the logic of that argument is, what they are saying is, "We've got bad economic times coming, so what we should do is let this underground economy grow and let those people out there, those employees who aren't covered, fend for themselves. They can get work when they can find it, and if they're not covered and they've got an injury, they're on their own."

When times are tough, we should all share the burdens here. One way to lift the burden off those disadvantaged or employees treated unequally is to bring them into the system. If that makes for a healthy employee, it makes for a healthy economy, and it's the kind of place that people want to come to to work.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I don't think the member who just spoke appreciates the irony of a Toronto lawyer, a member of this Legislature, telling small-town business people how to run their businesses. It is just unbelievable that he knows best with respect to people who are out there struggling day after day, six, seven days a week, 12, 14 hours a day, to make a living to support their families and keep people employed, and we have a Toronto-based lawyer telling them, "I know what's best for you, man. I know what's best for you, ma'am." That is just unbelievable.

I'm speaking on this. I wasn't originally going to speak to this issue, but my constituency office has been flooded with e-mails, calls and letters from small business people extremely concerned about the impact

this is going to have on their businesses. This has been mentioned and referenced by some of my colleagues, given the trying times that the economy is currently facing, especially in the province of Ontario.

Today we had an announcement for the first time in the history of this province: We are now a have-not province—a shameful day in the history of this province and the history of this Confederation. This is the situation we are all facing. This government is now running an unnecessary deficit because of its spending patterns. We are now a have-not province because of the policies they've instituted over the past five years. Now, in the midst of what looks like a recession, with very difficult times ahead, they're imposing an additional tax on the people who can least afford it in this province; the small-business people, who are working so hard to try to keep the heads of their communities, and their employees who work for them, above water. That's the situation with respect to this legislation.

The reality is that we're hearing rumours now that the government is going to impose closure, time allocate this legislation on Wednesday. Talk about adding shame to shame to shame. Why would they even contemplate doing something like that? I will suggest it's because people are becoming aware of the implications of this legislation. Small-business people across the province are becoming aware of it and they're upset, they're concerned—genuinely, legitimately concerned—about the impact of this additional burden on their ability to do business in this once great province.

Clearly, this is another broken promise on the part of the McGuinty Liberal government. We all recall his once again—how many times have we heard this with the McGuinty government?—solemn pledges, solemn promises. Then, at the first opportunity, the first sniff of an additional revenue source, they're right there, sending out the tax officials to make sure you're there and paying it, and paying it on time.

Interjection: They have to pay for their inspector.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I'll mention that in a little bit of time, about the additional public servants who have been hired by this government—an unsustainable situation.

Earlier today during question period I asked the Minister of Small Business about this legislation and what position he had taken, because I think we all appreciate that he is, in theory anyway, the advocate. One of I would think his key responsibilities is to be the advocate for small business in government, and especially around the cabinet table. He's got to be bringing their concerns to the table, advocating on their behalf, making sure their voices are heard, their concerns are heard and that changes are made, if and when necessary, to legislation or to regulation so that we address those concerns, understand and appreciate the challenges they're facing.

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I asked them several direct questions and so did my colleague from Sarnia, Mr. Bailey. Did we get any answers? Did we get one answer out of six specific ques-

tions about his position on the legislation? What advocacy role he played with respect to this going before cabinet committees? Again, nothing from the minister. Supposedly he has the title of small-business minister, but clearly he's missing in action when it comes to this file. Again, that is truly regrettable. If we don't have any voices on that side—I don't know. We have a majority government. They're limiting opportunities for debate. We're hearing they're going to close off even those limited opportunities. It's a very difficult and challenging situation and we see it on a day-to-day basis.

We're talking about—and my colleagues have mentioned this as well—an additional cost burden—a tax, we'll call it—of up to \$11,000 a year on businesses. If you look at the tax structure in this province currently and look at the comments of one of the premier advisors to the government, Dr. Roger Martin from the University of Toronto Rotman School of Business, he said the tax structure in this province is just plain dumb. We have the highest corporate tax rates, perhaps, in the western world. We're not competitive. We're not able to attract new business. We've increased regulation at an enormous clip. We are doing things in this province that discourage initiative and investment.

Over five years, this government has increased spending by 50%. They've brought in the highest tax increase in the history of the province. They've hired more public servants than all other provinces combined. When those concerns and issues are raised, what do they say? They blame the federal government. They blame somebody else. There's no recognition, no appreciation, no willingness to take a step back and take a look at what we've been doing, what we contemplate doing, what the impacts have been and what they will be going forward, with respect to the economy and the future economic well-being of this province.

Just before the finance minister's meeting today I was reading a comment from Finance Minister Duncan, the provincial Minister of Finance, again complaining about the federal government, and the quote was, "They just don't get it." I would suggest the people who just don't get it are sitting across the aisle. The current government just doesn't get it. They don't have any understanding or appreciation of what's going on in this economy and the impact that their policies, their legislation has had on this deteriorating situation.

You can look at what's happening in other jurisdictions, and just recently we've seen British Columbia and Saskatchewan move in dramatically different directions, cutting red tape and cutting business taxes.

Again, this government has the blinders on, unwilling to consult, unwilling to listen to people who may be construed as critics but really care about the future of this province, ignore them and move ahead with whatever they had contemplated and commitments they had made to various unknown parties, we'll say at this stage, because I think the big question surrounding all of this is, given the tenor of the sad and challenging economic times the province is currently facing, why in the world

would the government be doing this? I think that we have some answers to that. We have some suspicions surrounding the rationale for that and I'll touch on those a little later.

It also perplexes me. If you look at the McGuinty Liberal government not being students of history—and I have mentioned this in the past when we've dealt with financial issues. If you look at the Peterson era: They were in government five years as well. They increased spending over that five years by around 45%. This government has increased it by 50%.

I've mentioned this before, but I think it's worth repeating. I recall very vividly at the time the governor of the Bank of Canada calling on Premier Peterson and then the finance minister, Bob Nixon, to curb their spending; they were driving up inflation across Canada. The government of Ontario, because of its spending practices, was driving up inflation right across the country. Mr. Peterson and his finance minister essentially said, "Go fly a kite," and kept their spending pattern up.

I recall vividly, and perhaps the House leader for the NDP will recall, the spring budget of the Peterson government in 1990, where they were going to have a surplus. I think it was a modest surplus—

Mr. Peter Kormos: But a surplus nonetheless.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: A surplus nonetheless. We hear, day in and day out, that the former Conservative government left a significant deficit for the Liberal government. We left with six months left in the fiscal year. That's something else they don't talk about.

The reality is that when the NDP government came into office in 1990, they were faced with, I think, a \$3.5-billion to \$4-billion deficit, when just a few months earlier, Mr. Nixon had said, "We're going to have a surplus." Mr. Nixon and Mr. Peterson didn't have to face two bouts of SARS and a blackout, which significantly impacted on the well-being of the provincial economy.

Talk about—well, I can't use the words, but that's part of history. Apparently, this government has not looked back at the impact the Peterson spending had, not only in terms of leaving a deficit, but by the fact that they were unable and unprepared to cope with a downturn in the economy. The NDP government came into office, and I think they made some unfortunate decisions in terms of how to respond to that. They tried to spend their way out of that recession, but the reality is that Mr. Peterson and company, because of their spending practices—a 45% increase over five years—taxing and increasing regulation, put the province in a position where it wasn't able to adequately cope with a downturn in the economy.

What happens? The current government come into office in 2003. Five years later, we see that they've even topped the Peterson record, increasing spending by 50%, hiring more public servants than all other provinces combined, increasing regulation at a breakneck pace and on and on. That's the current reality in the province of Ontario. They can blame external affairs for part of the problem; there's no question about that. The dollar, fuel prices, energy prices and so on have impacted, and we

see economies around the world being impacted. But the reality is that because of their decisions over the past five years, they've put this province in a very difficult position and contributed significantly to the weakness of the economy of this province. But they're not willing to even address meaningful ways they can correct direction in terms of decisions they've made over the past five years, let alone accept that.

Again, I want to talk about the situation that they have decided to add additional burden on employers in this province. This is a situation where we hear varying numbers, but around 230,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost since 2004, and we're having weekly announcements. I had another company in my riding, Prescott, announce just last week that they're closing down—about 50 jobs. They make plastic pipe. They're closing the facility down. That's the sort of environment we're working in. We hear it. All of us hear it. One of my colleagues just sent me a note about a company that's in the linen business, with 15 stores in the province, announcing they're going to close all 15 stores. Those are the situations, along with the burdens that businesses have in the normal working world. That's the environment that business people are facing in the province of Ontario. The Liberal government has opted in this circumstance to bring in a new tax, a significant tax, on these small businesses.

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I want to commend Catherine Swift and Judith Andrew, from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, who have been very vocal in expressing concern about this and making sure their membership is aware of it. I think they're getting the word out now, and that's part of the reason we're getting the feedback that we are. That's part of reason that I believe the government wants to shut down debate on this, before the opposition grows to a state where it's going to be perhaps less manageable.

Our side of the House wants to make sure that everyone gets a fair opportunity to be heard on this, and hopefully we will have an extended debate so that that indeed happens. I do want to note the absence, so far anyway, of the chamber of commerce, and I would encourage small business people who are members of their chamber to get after their local chamber and get after the provincial chamber of commerce. I am not going to be overly critical at this stage, but I think the chamber has not fulfilled its role in terms of carefully scrutinizing the initiative of this government in the way they should be scrutinizing them, especially given the state of the Ontario economy. I'm not going to be shy about saying that. I could say a number of other things, but I'll refrain at this stage. We'll see what happens in the future.

I want to get back to the rationale for this decision, especially the timing. I think it goes against rational reason, the motivation. I want to raise the name of Pat Dillon. Has anyone heard Pat Dillon's name? When the announcement was made of this initiative by the Minister of Labour, Mr. Dillon was front and centre in the press

announcements. If you read Canadian Press or read any of the news stories, a fellow by the name of Pat Dillon was there, lauding this announcement, saying it was the greatest thing since sliced bread: "We really need this." Well, Pat Dillon happened to be the co-chair of an organization of unions called Working Families Coalition. Working Families spent millions to elect and re-elect the Liberal government—so, passing strange that Mr. Dillon was out there as one of the chief spokespersons for this initiative.

I know under the standing orders—I don't want to be called to order for imputing false or unavowed motives. It would be the last thing I would want to do. But I would ask those of you viewing or listening to this proceeding, or reading Hansard in the future, and encourage you to connect the dots with respect to Mr. Dillon being a strong advocate for this.

I just want to quickly put a few of the e-mails that I've had on the record here, Speaker. I'm missing the largest one I had here, wherever it's gone to. I've got just too much paper on my desk. Here it is. This is from Herb Lagois of Lagois Drafting and Construction, renovators in the greater Ottawa area:

"I am strongly against any changes that would force me to cover workers under WSIB. The choice to apply and purchase optional WSIB coverage ought to rest with the employer since, under the current regime, private insurance provides greater protection and coverage.

"The proposed legislation directly impacts my business and will add significant costs to employment.... mandatory coverage is overburdensome towards small operators throughout Ontario who currently have the option to stay with a private insurer....

"The ministry claims that reforms will increase worker safety. Minister Fonseca states in the press release that the proposed legislation 'will contribute to our goal of making Ontario's workplaces the safest in the world.' In fact, the likely consequence to any changes to the act will have the opposite effect, as it will increase underground business in an industry where such activity is already pervasive. Any changes would not only make it more difficult to employ skilled labour, it will also fail to achieve its intended purpose of increasing health and safety standards."

Roger Gunthorpe from Kemptville: "Bob: we run two small businesses in Kemptville and we are very concerned about this legislation... Does the government not realize the tough times that small, honest businesses have to deal with every day, let alone the gloomy future that appears to be ahead? If the present government wants to put us out of business with this kind of action, why don't they do it swiftly and then we can join the line up for handouts with the rest of the Liberals. Or do they want us to go underground?"

Wally Earl, from Green Things in Brockville: "As the company owner, I carry private policies for disability, etc. This way I can," as a business person, "get competitive bids and ensure I get the best coverage at the lowest price." That makes an awful lot of sense to me, and, I suspect, to most fair-minded Ontarians.

I think we get right back to motivation. Why is the government doing this? Why are they doing it at this point in the province's history when small businesses are facing significant, significant challenges? I personally believe that what's behind this initiative is nothing short of scandalous.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Kormos: After this eight, 10 minutes of questions and comments with respect to the comments made by Mr. Runciman, leader of the Conservative Party, the leader of the NDP, Howard Hampton, will be addressing this piece of legislation. We look forward to Howard Hampton's comments. I tell you, he is speaking for the New Democratic Party when he makes those comments here today.

Look, the New Democrats strongly and firmly believe that every worker in the province is entitled and should have access to WSIB, workers' compensation, and the benefits that accrue. It's a shame and it's a crime when there's ever a single injury. One of the other observations—it's an aggravation of that crime if that injury is suffered upon the worker and then the worker receives no compensation.

One of the other things we understand full well is that the rate of injuries amongst younger workers is much higher than it is amongst older workers, more experienced workers and more mature workers. One of the phenomenon is summer students. We've witnessed some incredible tragedies in this province of summer students, midway through an academic career and pursuing any number of careers in post-secondary school, college and university, who are then crippled, maimed, killed, slaughtered or murdered in our workplaces. The extension of workers' compensation—WSIB benefits—will have in no small way some of the biggest impact on younger workers.

You heard some comments earlier about the phenomenon amongst student workers and how student workers are more likely to be lured, along with new Canadians from time to time, into signing or agreeing to contractual relationships rather than traditional employer-employee relationships that are used from time to time by unscrupulous employers to exempt themselves from responsibility for workers' comp coverage. I'm looking forward to Mr. Hampton's comments in this regard.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bob Delaney: It's a pleasure to comment on the discourse by the member from Leeds-Grenville. I find it hard to grasp just what it is that he's proposing here. Is he suggesting that we institutionalize the revenue leakage from WSIB? Because this seems to be the essence of his remarks. Is he suggesting that we perpetuate the underground economy by allowing people to essentially be free riders against the people who pay their WSIB premiums? Because this is the essence of his remarks. Is he suggesting that law-abiding employers in the construction business be penalized and bear the costs of

those who want to be the free riders, so that, for example, someone who employs, for argument's sake, 25 workers, but may pay eight or nine WSIB premiums—and, of course, in the unfortunate event that a worker is injured, it will always be one of those deemed to have paid their WSIB premiums, whereas in the other firm that says, "Okay, we run a clean shop here," everybody pays their WSIB premiums. Is he suggesting that this is the Ontario that he believes in? I hope not, because that's not the Ontario that I believe in.

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What I'm here to advocate and why I support this bill is to get that level playing field so that the good actors, the people who are running a clean game, who are making a quote based on paying their entire WSIB premiums, are not going to be undercut by somebody who says, "Oh, just quote a couple less. We're going to be able to sort of slide under with a lowball quote on that," a lowball quote that's based on being a free rider by letting somebody else pay all of their WSIB premiums, and you don't pay yours. That's fundamentally unfair. That's what this bill aims to address.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to rise to speak to the member for Leeds-Grenville and comment on some of the issues he raised. I think it's important, particularly because of the comments that were just made, that we review what Bill 119 is talking about doing.

Currently, optional insurance under section 12 of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act is available for independent operators, sole proprietors, partners in partnership and executive officers for corporations. My colleague from Leeds-Grenville raised this issue. We are talking about business owners, and I can give you an example in my riding of Dufferin-Caledon, who currently have insurance—as he phrases it, 24-hour, gold-plated insurance. He is now being forced, if Bill 119 goes through, to be covered under WSIB. He will have less coverage and it will cost his company more to do it.

We are talking about choice. If there's anything that the Conservative Party believes in, it's the ability for businesspeople, for individuals, for families in Ontario to choose, and this is what Bill 119 is removing for small-business operators across Ontario. I think it's an unfortunate time that we're discussing this in now, when businesspeople and small entrepreneurs in Ontario are facing such challenging times—this, when, instead of talking about economic prosperity and improving the economic climate in Ontario, we're bringing in changes to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act which will ultimately make it more challenging for small businesses across Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to address some of the comments made by the member for Leeds-Grenville. I would say the focus of his comments really had to do with one part of the equation, and that is that

the employer will have to pay for workplace safety and insurance. It certainly failed to look at the other side of the equation, which has to do with the benefits that will be brought upon the workers who will be covered.

There are presently over 90,000 workers and their families who work in the construction industry who are not covered by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board. Those people are at risk. Insurance would lead them to believe that you can still go to the hospital and be covered, you can still see your physician and be covered. Maybe that is so, but that doesn't do anything. Most of the people who are injured suffer musculoskeletal-type problems, which often require physio. That would be covered under WSIB, but it is not covered for most other people.

It also deals very much with younger workers, the ones who don't have much choice in the jobs they will take. They basically take any job because they're just starting out. They don't have the experience of older workers as to how to safely work. There is no workplace safety, there are no committees to prepare them, because all the joint health and safety committees that come with WSIB are all on the promotion side, on keeping the workers from being injured in the first place. Those are all on the benefits side, but the member did not address those.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The member for Leeds—Grenville for a response?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I thank those who participated in responses.

I think the member for Dufferin—Caledon really struck the right note. We've heard both the Liberal and NDP members talking about uninsured people, and she was talking about how right now people in the construction business, across the system, unless they're operating under the table, do have insurance coverage for their employees. She used an example of someone in her riding with gold-plated coverage; they're now going to be forced into this process where they'll get lesser coverage at a higher cost.

Take a look at the board, and we hear complaints all the time about premiums, about the unfunded liability, about the efficiency of that operation. At the head of it, we have a former Liberal MPP making over \$400,000 a year. This is the sort of thing that these small business-people are being obligated by government legislation to join. It's like telling us you've got to post all your mail through Canada Post. We can use all kinds of examples of government-run bureaucracies that have options in the private sector which can be and quite often are much more efficient and cost-effective, but the government of the day, in this case the Liberal government of Mr. McGuinty, is saying, "You can't look at those options, you can't have that choice. You're going down this road. It's the government road or go under, buster. Let's just have the big businesses, the unionized operations. They'll be able to handle the business load that you can't any longer. It may have an impact on your small community, your rural area; so be it."

That's the attitude of this government, and I've indicated why. I think it's a backroom deal, and that's the rationale behind all of this.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate.

Mr. Howard Hampton: On behalf of New Democrats, I'm pleased to be able to make some comments on this legislation and to make some comments on the dynamics that I believe underlie WSIB coverage or lack of WSIB coverage in Ontario today.

The heart of this bill is to ensure that workers who are not at this time covered by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, workers who are in the construction industry, will become covered under the WSIB system. We're talking about 90,000 workers and their families. We believe that there are many workers who work as so-called independent contractors now who would like to be covered, but the way the system is set up now, it encourages conduct and behaviour which results in those workers not being covered by workers' compensation. In that regard, the New Democrats want to thank the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario for their advocacy on this issue over the last 15 years.

In the last 15 years, the Ontario construction industry—and this is what we need to recognize—has been substantially restructured by the hiring and subcontracting to independent contractors. The use of independent contractors has resulted in thousands of workers in the construction industry potentially being deprived of WSIB coverage and has created a group of employees who are entitled to claim benefits, but for whom no contributions have been paid. I think if anyone thinks about that for a minute, people would say, "Well, that's an unbalanced system." That is part of the problem. The system that we have now is unbalanced.

But it's unbalanced in another way: The contractor who insists on subcontracting to firms that portray themselves as independent operators rather than as employing workers has an unfair competitive advantage. One contractor bids on the contract, and all of his workers are covered by WSIB; another contractor bids on the contract, and he uses the independent contractor or the appearance of independent contractors to avoid paying WSIB in order to be able to submit a lower bid. The question that needs to be asked is, what happens to one of those so-called independent contractors, or someone who is made to appear as an independent contractor, if they then get hurt on the job? No WSIB coverage. The full cost, then, of their medical coverage, their medical services, falls on the health care system, and the health care system is then used to subsidize a mechanism which is unfair in the first place. So this legislation is needed to deal with that.

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We think it's wrong that some employers should be able to shift their workplace health and safety costs, their workplace injury costs, onto the health care system, whereas other construction employers have to cover those costs through WSIB and the WSIB premiums they

pay. This legislation must come to grips with that. I'm not fully convinced that the legislation, as put forward by the McGuinty government at this time, does fully come to grips with this issue, but that's a detail that I hope we can get to the bottom of over the next few days.

In other words, the present WSIB coverage scheme, which excludes independent operators from compulsory workplace coverage, has created an economic disparity between two firms in the same industry: one, as I say, which complies with WSIB and ensures that all of its workers are covered by WSIB premiums; and another, which goes through the game of saying, "Well, you know, we really think these are independent contractors," and thus avoids WSIB coverage.

In our view, if contractors are considered independent operators under the WSIB act, the firm they contract with is not required to pay workplace insurance assessments on their earnings. In our view, that's what's happening now.

New Democrats don't believe that the WSIB act should be a source of economic advantage between otherwise similar firms in the same industry. Again, that's why we support the general thrust of this legislation, although we do have some concerns about the details.

There is some history to this. Whether you call it the Workers' Compensation Board or the WSIB, it has grappled historically with this issue of what to do with independent operators. I could go into that history, but let me just say that we believe the method that is currently being used, which is called the organizational test, is simply not working. Frankly, we believe it's being manipulated, because what happens is this: The test—employers are asked to fill out this test, and workers are asked to fill out this form—examines whether the person supplying labour is part of the main contractor's organizational structure or is actually a separate enterprise.

We believe, when you actually sit down and look at the form and the kinds of questions it asks, that it can and does result in some manipulation. Why? First, because the subjective self-scoring nature of the questionnaire allows for manipulation. The person completing the questionnaire can tailor their answers to arrive at themselves being either a worker or an independent operator, whichever suits their purpose in the particular case. A person seeking benefits for a work-related injury answers the questions in such a way as to achieve worker status and therefore is entitled to benefits. A person seeking to opt out of the WSIB insurance system answers the questions so that he or she achieves an independent operator result.

In many cases, people are actually instructed by a prospective employer to obtain an independent operator ruling from the WSIB as a condition for getting the job. In other words, if you don't answer the questions such that you're found to be an independent contractor, you won't get hired. I think that is manipulation.

Financial incentives drive the push for independent operator status. For example, employers are relieved

from paying WSIB premiums, experience rating adjustments and other payroll assessments for persons portraying themselves as independent operators.

Another factor is that independent operators are able to make deductions for business expenses as self-employed persons and pay income tax at a lower rate than that of an employee. So again, one can connive at getting an economic or a financial advantage, even though one is doing substantially the same work as someone who is covered by the WSIB system.

What does this mean for the WSIB system? Let me say that I'm not a defender of the current WSIB. I think there are a lot of problems, horrendous problems, with the WSIB. But at its heart, the WSIB system is about ensuring that workers who go to work every day—and the construction industry has all kinds of health and safety concerns, has all kinds of potential for serious worker injury—should not, if they are injured, be left on their own, nor should they simply go to the health care system and say, "Well, now that I've been injured at work, the health care system, medicare, has to look after me." There has to be a system of self-insurance for firms working in the construction industry, and we call that system WSIB. If it's going to work fairly for workers and if it's going to work fairly for employers, it seems to me that you can't have some people being exempted and other people paying very high rates. In fact, the more you play this game of, "Oh, well, we exempt you because you look like you're an independent contractor" or "We exempt you because you look to be an independent agent," then the higher the insurance rates go for those people who work within the system and play by the rules.

So what we really need to do here is make sure the playing field is fair and make sure the playing field is even and balanced. That also has a positive outcome for the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board because it ensures that, in fact, the WSIB will receive more premiums being paid and thus be able, in theory, to address the needs of workers who are injured on the job. As I say, under the current system, WSIB is not collecting, literally, millions of dollars in premiums as a result of independent contractors who do not fall within the current test—a test which I say, and many others have said, is fraught with all kinds of opportunity to manipulate.

Now, it has been said that independent operators have the option of declaring for WSIB insurance coverage. Yes, they have the option. That seems to be very rarely used. Again, the reason that it's very rarely used is because, if you follow the way the system works, and works badly now, there's a financial incentive for somebody who achieves the independent operator or independent contractor designation not to pay premiums and not to be covered by the system. It's estimated that the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board is losing about \$350 million per year in unpaid premiums as a result of this system. This has led to a decline in the payroll base in the construction industry class and, as I said earlier, has increased the premium rate for those companies that are working within the WSIB system and those

companies that want to ensure that their construction workers are covered by WSIB benefits.

In addition, there's another problem. Accident prevention and workplace health and safety is being compromised because under the present flawed system, the responsibility for workplace safety and prevention is being pushed down to the lowest level, the independent operator. This has the effect of constructors and contractors absolving themselves of the responsibility for workplace health and safety and experience rating adjustments for the persons they hire primarily to perform labour. So not only does it result in what I would regard as an unfair competitive system and not only does it result in a loss of WSIB premiums, which is the source of pensions and the source of health coverage for injured workers, this also eats away at the very system of workplace health and safety, responsibility, employers being responsible for ensuring that their workplaces are safe for workers, that their workplaces are healthy for workers. Because if you can opt out of the system, you can say, "Well, I'm not responsible for that. I'm just doing this job over here," and the whole system starts to corrode.

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In addition, under the existing system, some workers are being pressured by contractors to register themselves as employers. Like independent operators, these employers are not covered unless they purchase optional insurance from the WSIB, and many don't. So if you were to lay this all out on a map, it is potentially subject to abuse and manipulation, not in one way, not in two ways, but in several ways that really undermine safe work, healthy work, that really undermine fairness and good competition in the construction industry and that really undermine what happens to a worker when he or she is unfortunate enough to be injured on the job.

In short, independent operators leave registered, legitimate contractors to foot the bill. I think it's called "the free-rider principle": You pay and I'll benefit. That's unfair. So these are the problems that we see. Now, I could go on with some other concerns that we think are addressed, but I want to deal with some things we think are not adequately addressed.

The McGuinty government says the system that's there is not working for the construction industry and says it wants to fix it. But then, when we look at the legislation, what we find is that there's going to be an exemption related to private contractors dealing directly with homeowners. It's not exactly clear to me how you exempt contractors who one day are doing new home construction and the next day are doing renovation work or adapting the work that was done the day before or the week before. In my view, installing windows and doors in new construction is no more or less dangerous than installing windows and doors in a large scale renovation.

The point is that while there may be some scope for exempting true mom-and-pop operations, New Democrats are not sure that this home renovation exemption, this new exemption that is being proposed by the McGuinty Liberals, is exactly the right way to deal with

this scenario. And if it isn't tightened up, it could lead to the very kind of abuse and manipulation that we've seen in the system and which this legislation is supposed to deal with.

Now, related to this is the potential for home renovators to request that the homeowner directly hire the contractor's employees, which would obviously directly undermine the purpose of the bill, and you can see how this could be manipulated. So the renovation exemption, in our view, is a serious concern. We simply don't want it to become the new independent operator exemption and undo what good this bill has the potential to provide.

The other problem that we have, frankly, is this: The construction trades have pointed out that this is a serious problem, and they've been pointing out that it's been a serious problem for some time. They've come before various committees and spoken at various forums pointing out how it undermines the health and safety system, it undermines injured workers, it provides for inequality in fairness in terms of one contractor who pays WSIB premiums and another contractor who has avoided WSIB premiums. They've pointed out the manipulation and conniving that goes on; they've pointed out the pressure that's put on workers who want to be covered by WSIB, but are told, "Well, if you want the job, you better fill out the forms so that you don't look like an employee. You better fill out the forms so that you look like you're an independent contractor."

All of this has been pointed out over and over and over again, and it's been pointed out over the last number of years. The loss of insurance premiums to the WSIB system has been pointed out—the fact that 90,000 construction workers, who should have the benefit of WSIB coverage, are deprived of WSIB coverage. All of this is on the public record. Now, you would think, if all of this is on the public record, and it's been going on for some time, there would be some urgency on the part of the McGuinty Liberals to deal with this issue. But when you look at the legislation, you find that while the McGuinty government says this is a problem in 2008, under this legislation they're not going to do anything about it until 2012.

It sort of reminds me of something I have seen the McGuinty government do over and over again. They say that something is a serious problem and needs to be addressed, and promise to address it, and use all the fine words—all the right words and the right rhetoric—and then don't do anything; or, after promising, you read the fine print and it says, "We promise to do something about this in 2012," except I don't think there's a member in this Legislature who can tell you what the world is going to look like in 2012. If they do think they can tell you what the world is going to look like in 2012, I wonder what they were telling themselves about what the stock market was going to look like a week ago. That's the problem here.

This is an urgent situation now. The problems with the existing system have been recited chapter and verse, over and over again. The McGuinty government, when it

gives its speeches, says this is a problem and recognizes the issues, but then it says, "We're not going to do anything about it until 2012." Wrong. These are serious issues now. Workers are being hurt by this now, legitimate contractors are being hurt by it now and it deserves to be addressed now.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: I was listening attentively to the comments of the member for Kenora–Rainy River, and I think he really brought some valuable insight to the debate on this bill. It is a complicated area and involves thousands of workers and thousands of companies, small and large. But I think the bottom line—and he referred to it—is that this is about safety; this is about workers getting hurt on the job.

I know that the members of the Conservative Party want to talk about private insurance doing that. But we certainly don't want to go the route of the United States. If you get hurt in the United States, you have to go to these things called HMOs, which are insurance companies that dictate whether or not you get medical coverage. Do you know what they do? You have to get three estimates from the insurance company. It's just like when your car gets in a wreck. They say, "Go to three auto body shops and get the best estimate," and then the insurance company decides, and they take the cheapest one.

That's what you do in health coverage in the United States because the private insurance companies are there. What do you think the private insurance companies are there for? They're there to make their 20% and, God love them, they've got to make their profit. That's what the Conservatives are saying: "Let private insurance take care of people injured on job." Whom do you think the private insurance company is going to look after? Is it the poor young person or the poor immigrant who is injured on the job, or are they going to worry about their 20% or about the company?

That's why we need this government-protected system, so that it's fair and reasonable. It's not perfect, but it's a lot better being in the hands of the WSIB than being in the hands of the private insurance company that's looking at their 20% profit. That's why we need this kind of legislation, to ensure that if the worker is unfortunate and gets hurt, they get taken care of. Let's not forget that.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I respect the position and response of the member from Kenora–Rainy River to this legislation, in terms of his overwhelming support of the construction trades and others. But I would never want the people of Ontario to think we are not in support of persons being protected at work. What we are not in support of is this onerous tax that is arbitrarily being put on managers and owners who will never be entitled to collect under the structure of this particular legislation.

Our member from Simcoe North, who's going to be speaking next, knows full well, as an employer and a

tradesperson himself, and I'm waiting and anxious to hear his response to this.

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There are really more parts to this. If you look at a person who's injured at work, young or old, for the most part they are covered under OHIP, if they have a broken arm or some other injury. However, they are not covered for physiotherapy because it was delisted by the McGuinty government. Physiotherapy and chiropractors offer one of the rehabilitation techniques that are required to get a young employee or older employee back to work. They cancelled that and they also taxed people up to \$1,000 or \$900 a person with their employer health tax. But I think what's more important is, there are two parts to this that are really not being talked about: the NEL award, the non-economic loss component under WSIB, and the FEL award, the future economic loss.

I'm afraid that many members speaking, mostly on the government side, don't understand the WSIB anyway, and here they are mouthing the speeches that have been given to them about the NEL awards or the FEL awards, which they know nothing about. But this is an \$11,000-a-year tax on jobs; that's what it really is.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to comment after the presentation made by my leader, the member from Kenora–Rainy River, who basically talked about the need to cover those 90,000 workers who work in the construction industry and who are presently excluded from WSIB coverage, and their families. He also mentioned the great advocacy work that has been done for 15 long years by the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario to get their members covered.

The changes that he talked about will be in the best interests of the industry and the many construction workers who face unprotected risk right now, every single day, where they go to work.

He also talked about supporting the general thrust of the bill, that it seems to be a step in the right direction. But he outlined a series of concerns—concerns about how this bill could be rolled out, concerns about how committed the McGuinty Liberals are to this bill when they put a 2012 implementation date for this bill. It looks like it gives them plenty of room to back out if something happens. Those people who have waited for 15 years to see their members covered by WSIB don't want to be in a position that the McGuinty Liberals give themselves lots of room to change their mind. They want action sooner. Hopefully, we'll see it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: It gives me great pleasure to rise today to speak on the bill to extend the mandatory workers' compensation coverage to many individuals in construction who are not covered right now.

I would just like to say to the MPP from Durham that I've been working in that area for 14 years and I sat on two provincial reviews, one under the NDP and the other

one under the Conservative government. It was always the ask from the sector to make sure that everybody was covered. First of all, there's no better coverage than the WSIB. There's no private coverage that is as good as the WSIB. It doesn't matter what they are saying. We call it the historic trade-off, so they don't need to prove that they were responsible or not responsible; they will get the coverage, and it's excellent.

Yes, there are 90,000, and perhaps more, individuals who are not covered, and when they have an accident, they don't know where to turn. Most of them will turn to welfare to get the service that they need and the money that they need for their day-to-day living. It's not proper, when they have worked all their life, and they should be covered under the WSIB. And more employers will pay in the WSIB. It will reduce the cost for the other employers. I remember the last time I checked, there was \$14 billion of unfunded liability, so if everybody participates, it will help everyone.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm sorry. Are we still doing questions and comments?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I believe we've had four members give questions and comments.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I don't think so.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The member is not here for a response, so it's time for further debate.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Is Mr. Hampton not—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: No, I'm sorry. Are the Liberals—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm sorry, Madam Speaker. I thought we still had a couple of questions and comments remaining. I only counted two, and I thought Mr. Hampton would be here for his wrap-up as well, but that's fine.

I'm happy to rise, and I know there are a lot of people who want to speak on Bill 119, so I'm hoping that surely in this House, with the amount of opposition to this bill, we won't see time allocation on this. That would be disgraceful. And I understand that the government is contemplating it, because there's no question that each and every one of these members in this House is receiving literally hundreds of e-mails and letters opposed to this bill.

The other thing I hope—and I would expect they would only be natural and be fair about this—is that after the House adjourns for the winter session, we would have province-wide committee hearings on this bill as well. I know that the small-business operators throughout northern Ontario, central Ontario, in the GTA, would want to make sure that there was an opportunity to comment—much the same we did on Bill 50 this summer. I would hope that we would have the opportunity and that

our small-business operators would have an opportunity to voice their concerns in all the different communities we have across the province. I'm looking forward to sitting on that committee if we have that opportunity.

Again, I'm hoping it's not going to be a time allocation like we've seen with this joke of a bill this afternoon, the deficit bill, where there's 25 minutes of debate and a minute and a half of third reading debate, or whatever it is. It was just a disgrace, what happened this afternoon with that.

So, as we move forward, Bill 119, right off the bat we're asking for solid committee hearings and to let this bill run its course over the next few weeks so all of our speakers can get up and comment on this bill. I was disappointed just now that the Liberals didn't take their turn in the rotation. If they're so fond of this bill and it's such a wonderful bill, I can't understand why no one stood up for the Liberal rotation.

I think, right off the bat, what I want to read in—and I think some of these comments have already been read in earlier—is the letter from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and that's to the Honourable Peter Fonseca, just last week, Minister of Labour, 400 University Avenue, and it says:

“Dear Mr. Fonseca,

“In our long experience, we have dealt with legislators who put forward seriously misguided policies. The WSIB mandatory coverage legislation you tabled today falls squarely in that category. It will not level the playing field; on the contrary, it will tilt it in favour of large, unionized constructors. It will fail to get at the underground economy; present law breakers will no doubt evade the new law and dive deeper underground. It will not make one iota of difference on health and safety; companies with employees already have access to services from the safety association. What it will do is penalize the above-ground operators, who are already subsidizing the cheats, by requiring them to increase premiums (on average \$11,000 per year) in respect of their owners, officers and directors. And it will expose the WSIB to the nightmare of more unfounded claims from individuals who, in fact, are their own employer, and who will decide for themselves whether and for how long to claim benefits, perhaps even retire on that system.

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“What is unprecedented about your actions today is the level of betrayal of small and medium-size businesses. Your government's commitment to review a ‘named-insured’ approach to catching cheaters was not fulfilled; even though it was engineered to falter, it wasn't concluded. Your failure to consult with CFIB”—which is the organization that's writing the letter—“to even await your first meeting with us, before announcing your intentions can only be described at incredibly poor form. Your pleasant phone message indicating that as a brand new minister you wanted to work with CFIB belied your involvement in making a secret deal on mandatory coverage with construction unionists (as if removing democratic votes for union certification wasn't enough).

Springing this terrible announcement on hard-working small business people during Small Business Month, at a time when the economic outlook is shaky, is incredibly insensitive. Your seemingly cocky, uncaring attitude to the 25,000 action alerts we delivered from our members was distressing. And we see it as frankly dishonest that you equivocated as recently as last Thursday concerning your schedule for introduction and passage of this legislation.

"Most politicians we know are genuinely interested in doing their best for Ontarians. There may be disagreement on what is best, but at least their motives are pure. We believe that your motivation, on behalf of your government, has far more to do with political opportunism than it does with the policy at hand. This is a shame for Ontario. Shame on you.

"Yours truly

"Judith Andrew

"Vice-president" of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business in Ontario.

I wanted to read Ms. Andrew's comments in because I think they really summed up what we're hearing from many, many of our constituents. I'm sure the government members are hearing exactly the same thing. I'm sure they are.

I think when we start out here, the first thing is, the bill is not only ill-conceived, but also the timing couldn't be worse. If it was such an important bill to put forward, why didn't they do it five years ago when they did the mandatory retirement bill or something like that? Why wasn't it part of that, when it was a Ministry of Labour bill? Why now, at a point when the world economy is on a serious downturn, are we going to penalize our small-business operators even more?

I hear some of the comments like the underground world, that the people who are against this are underground world or they're fly-by-nighters. I'm going to start reading in a bunch of letters of some of these so-called fly-by-night operations. They are not. They pay their full taxes. They're good contributing members of our society and they want to know what's going wrong and what's wrong with a government that would force this on any province at a time like this. As we heard earlier, we are now a have-not province. That was announced today. I guess Minister Flaherty announced \$350 million to the provincial government because we can't cut it any more. We've taxed and spent and taxed and spent here like wildfire, and now you know what? We're going to tax and spend more money and take it out on our small-business operators.

What they should do with the WSIB is make it operate properly. The biggest problem we actually have here today is the inefficiencies within the system. I mentioned here a week ago about some of the inspectors they have today. They don't inspect by consistent laws and consistent rules. What's good for one person is not good for another. If you have three inspectors come into the same job site, they all have different views on the interpretation of the laws. Let's get those types of things running

smoothly. Let's make sure those are all efficient and effective, so that when a business operator has a WSIB inspector come through the door or a Ministry of Labour inspector, they know exactly what's at fault, what they're doing right or wrong and they're penalized accordingly. That's not the case today. It's simply not the case. Any one of us in this House can rhyme off a number of examples of that. When you get a complaint in an MPP constituency office, Madam Speaker, and I'm sure you see that yourself, when a person walks in with a WSIB file, it's like an inch and a half thick now because they're completely lost on what to do because not everyone receives their funding. Not everybody receives their cheques or their compensation if they in fact hurt their back or whatever it may be. We've seen that over and over again.

I think it was the member from Mississauga South who mentioned the sort of fly-by-night operations not playing on a fair playing field.

I'd like to read some of the letters that I've got. Here's one from a company in Orillia:

"Have received notice from CFIB about legislation regarding expanding the mandate of WSIB to include construction, with the opening to extend that to other small businesses."

When will that happen? Is that going to happen immediately? Is that going to happen six months from now? In 2013? Do we really know when any of these things will take place? They've certainly found out that these dates they keep throwing out with announcements that five, 10, 15, 20 years from now, they're going to clean up some of the problems—why don't we just deal with stuff that's going to take effect in the next few months so the general public can deal with it? Who knows, with these rules that are going on and legislation that's being passed, if it will actually take place 10 years from now.

I continue on with the letter: "It seems that Fonseca is trying to ram this through with little to no consultation."

Well, we know that's true. No one has consulted with anyone in this House. We've had no briefings, and of course the CFIB hasn't been consulted with. It's an embarrassment to say you're a legislator here with this kind of stuff being rammed through.

"I am most concerned about this.

"My business deals with many small construction companies/contractors. What adversely affects them is going to adversely affect the businesses they deal with. And the last thing any of us need is more government regulation and fees to deal with should they decide to extend this further.

"If the WSIB actually helped injured workers, that would be one thing, but my experience has been mountains of paperwork and poor treatment by health care support workers (receptionists/secretaries/front-line) when it was found to be a WSIB related claim ... from an insider this was probably due to the mountain of paperwork they were going to have to deal with because it's a WSIB claim. I've done volumes of photocopying for individuals fighting with WSIB to receive benefits they are sup-

posedly entitled to or trying to find other employment opportunities and WSIB blocks them at every turn. I've also done photocopying from WSIB workers who feel harassed and harried and unable to actually do their jobs because they are tied up in knots doing paperwork to justify higher-up jobs. I am not interested in their so-called insurance ... I'd rather get my own or go out of business." That's what we're hearing. They'd rather go out of business than play with these guys.

"I realize it's an uphill battle for you as opposition in minority, but if you are able to use your vote and ensure as many others as possible are there to use theirs against this nonsense, it would be sincerely appreciated by many, many small businesses in this province.

"Thanks for letting me vent."

That's from a small-business operator in the city of Orillia.

I'm going to read a number of them here, but the reality is that we have got hundreds and hundreds of them now, and I think our small-business operators deserve the respect of this House to at least have some of their letters read in.

Here's a company, RM Products, up in the Orillia area as well:

"I urge you to take another look at this legislation and not simply push it through. As a small-business owner, I know that we are required to have director's insurance. I am sure that if we are required, most other legitimate firms are also. Therefore, why would we need to pay WSIB also? This is a scary time for business as it is so this is the best time to bring more cost to business?"

"I would also like to know how this legislation would stop the underground economy. Could you elaborate?"

I don't know how to elaborate. It's not going to stop the underground economy, quite simply. What's going to happen is more small businesses are going to fold and there are going to be more people than ever out there working for cash on the weekends, that sort of thing, and they'll be out there. It will not stop it at all; we all know that. We see it on a day-to-day basis. There are just going to be more people to share in the underground economy.

I've got another one here from another company up in my riding:

"Please advise what the Conservative Party is doing about this.

"In our meeting last Thursday with Labour Minister Fonseca, we made good use of the strong comments you provided in reaction to his announcement on mandatory WSIB coverage of independent operators ... in construction. (Thanks!) Still, it is clear that this minister doesn't care about small business, being so much in the pocket of the construction unions and their big business buddies. The bill received first reading on October 28; second reading started October 29; and it appears the Liberals intend to ram it through third and final reading quickly."

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You know what? That seems to be the consensus here, that this bill will go through very quickly, probably without province-wide committee hearings.

Now, as we know, this bill affects many, many small businesses across our country, small contractors, so I'm going to say again that I'm hoping that at least we have the respect, and the respect of the small-businesses operators in the province of Ontario, not to see this rammed through. There's no emergency on this bill; there's nothing pushing. They could have done it five years ago if it was such an urgent matter. Let's at least have the opportunity to let our small-business operators across Ontario come to committee hearings and show why they support or do not support this legislation.

Another from a welding company up in Orillia:

"If this passed, my costs go up to cover nothing. Or I become a crook and go on WSIB for injuries I just endured in the past. WSIB will pay me and probably a lot like me to stay at home, collect WSIB and still run the company. You should read the letter from CFIB to Mr. Fonseca. (Rather strong.) Who is watching these guys?"

The reality is, I think one of the things we found in the last few years is the number of people who have memberships in the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. I have a great deal of respect for them, because as a small business person myself in the past, we were a member of that organization, and they continually provided good information to all their membership. They were supportive of the members they had, and I think it was well worth being part of that. So at least they're getting out to their members and passing this information along as well.

This one—I won't read that one. Here's one that's from a—

Mr. Peter Kormos: Why not?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Pardon?

Interjection.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Well, no. They're all fairly well—

Mr. Peter Kormos: You looked at it real quick.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Well, no. I can go back to it. I can go back.

Mr. Peter Kormos: It's okay.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: "Just heard of recent comments by our labour minister regarding WSIB coverage of corporate officers, owners etc. I hope this is only political crap for the masses? Can verify one way or the other."

You get a lot of this kind of thing. But, again, here we are: another person saying it's an assault on small business. And you know what? Small businesses are the main people who employ the bulk of the people in our country, and we're just contributing more to the underground economy.

I received another one:

"I received this communication from CFIB and we are all very concerned. They spoke at our builders' meeting last night and we were shocked at what we heard about Minister Fonseca's plans with regard to WSIB and small business.

"I understand he was reluctant to meet with CFIB on the issues and went ahead with the readings without meeting with CFIB in regards to small business concerns.

"Please can you look into this and get the minister to look at small business with a different set of eyes. This is very upsetting and I fear that this (if it passes) will not help small business. It will actually drive up costs to our clients, and it will drive the smaller firms deeper underground where they will be 'safe' from prying eyes but will endanger our clients ever further.

"What we need to do is stop unregistered companies from dealing with clients until they become legitimate businesspeople and then we can address concerns regarding payroll deductions, WSIB, insurance and other issues.

"Does the government not care about small businesses or are they (Fonseca) just concerned with big business and how it can drive us down into the ground and take over our jobs? Read as more unemployment and more illegitimate companies.

"Sorry to go off like this, Garfield, but my business is my life—you can relate. If Fonseca and the Liberals are going to keep this up, they are going to lose all their power if word gets out. Maybe that is why Mr. Dion is leaving: It's getting hot."

Well, you know, that's another—I guess I got that mixed up. Dion was history the day he took on the job, especially when he's up against Harper.

But the reality is, you know what? The small business community is adamantly opposed to this legislation. The Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario is adamantly opposed to this legislation. And I want the small business people out there to know that we will fight this all the way.

We know they want to rush it through; we know they want to ram it through. They will likely time-allocate the bill. We will likely have almost no committee hearings on this particular bill, and that's disgraceful. The reality is that we're standing here today asking the government not to time-allocate it, to give us a lot of opportunity to have all our members speak—I see the Liberals have quit speaking on it already—and we want committee hearings on it. It's very, very important to the future of this province, and to the future of our young people and of the people who create those jobs in small businesses, that we get out there and fight this all the way.

I have been very happy to speak this afternoon on behalf of my caucus members. Again, we in the PC Party will be fighting this all the way. We think this is an assault on the small business community, an assault on small businesses in rural Ontario, and we are very, very much opposed to this piece of legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Kormos: I'm going to be able to speak to this bill in just a few minutes' time, and I'm looking forward to that. New Democrats, as you know, are grateful to the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario for their advocacy on this issue over the last decade and a half.

There's an estimate of 90,000 workers who are being denied access to workers' comp—WSIB coverage.

That's a serious problem and one we have begun to address, but those are the workers in the construction trades only. One of the things that offends me—and I'm going to have a chance to talk about it—is having to explain to a worker in the financial services sector why he or she, after suffering an injury in their workplace—in those workplaces, common ones are RSI, repetitive strain injury—is not entitled to workers' comp. I'm also amazed that there are various transfer payment agencies, and you're aware of those as well, that have the capacity to opt out.

This is the beginning of an exercise that will ensure that workers who risk injury are part of a broad-based, publicly operated, no-fault insurance system. It will provide security for them, for their families, for their children. I'm going to have a chance to talk about kids growing up in the family of an injured worker. Boy, their lifestyle changes in short order, especially if dad or mom is a tradesperson making reasonably good wages. Make no mistake about it: Workers' comp is there, but you're not living the life of Riley when you're on workers' comp. What that does to kids—

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: It's better than private insurance.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Don't get me going. I'll talk about private insurance, Madame Meilleur, and if you and Mr. Colle want to join me in the fight for public auto insurance, it's not too late. I'm no fan of the private insurance companies, and I'm no fan of—

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: You had the chance when you were there.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Well, no. Your friend Bob Rae quashed the deal. My God, can't you people be more careful about who you pick as friends?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: I was just listening to the member from Simcoe North, and he put forward his concerns about the impact this might have on business. But what he didn't mention is the impact that not having insurance has on ordinary people working on construction who could injure themselves. When you get injured working on construction, it's not like when you have a desk job. If you injure your knee or dislocate a shoulder, you can't work for maybe months and years. This is not just about business.

It's very good to have businesses that are protecting their workers; that's what we're saying. We've got nothing against business, but we also know that if you've got good, productive workers who are taken care of if they get hurt, they get back to work faster and it's good for the bottom line. The health and safety of workers is something that this province has taken very seriously.

For 15 years, there has been an attempt to address this gap in the protection of injured workers. Again, we have to think of those workers in this kind of weather, or as the snow comes. They're up on rooftops and scaffolds, in ditches, digging out sewers. It's tough work, and you get hurt. Hundreds of my constituents are walking with canes

because they got hurt on construction. Some of them got hurt a long time ago, when there wasn't proper insurance. Luckily, some of them have gotten protection. You can't depend on the whims of the marketplace to protect people who get hurt on the job. These are workers in Hamilton, workers in Welland, workers in Oshawa. They deserve this protection because they work in extremely difficult conditions in construction. That's what this is about.

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The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: The member from Simcoe North speaks with a great deal of understanding and, more importantly, compassion on the issue. What he's saying is that the unfairness provisions of Bill 119—to me, I think it's important. I've gotten letters here, thousands of them actually, from members of the small business community. The general tone—I'll read it with it your indulgence. It's directed to me from my constituent, a small business, whose number is 840438 in this instance—and they're all here. "While Ontario businesses, including mine, struggle to cope with"—the McGuinty—"high fuel and energy costs, a strong Canadian dollar and intense foreign competition, we are further undermined by the heavy-handed, enforcement arm of government."

Now, it's in that tone where they're—they're making it even worse now to do business in Ontario, at a time when the economy is so hard for working families. Well, not for the working families that supported this bill, but for the working families, generally. The member from Simcoe North was simply trying to make the point about the fairness of all of this. We support protecting workers, as the WSIB, today and as we did and will in government, with respect to the intentions and the interest. But self-employed individuals—someone renovating my home—may not have a job now because of this. Do you understand? That's what this is about. It's about small, very small, businesses that work on their own, as Mr. Dunlop would know. He employs, I would imagine, probably 50 employees in his time doing revisions as well as buildings in the community. Those are jobs. Let's not lose sight of what this is about. At a time when the economy is going south, they're taxing them to death.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I just wanted to respond to the comments that the member from Simcoe North and a number of the other members from the official opposition have made because I'm getting increasingly concerned as I listen to the comments and I look, quite frankly, at the letters that are crossing my desk in my constituency office. There is significant misunderstanding out there about the purpose of this bill. This bill is focused specifically and applies only to the construction industry. There's a long-standing problem in the construction industry with workers who have not been covered, and we do need to address that and find ways to manage people in the construction industry who are not covered.

What I have heard from the member from Simcoe North, and what I have heard from the other Conservative members, and what I am hearing from form letters that are coming from the CFIB is a misconception that somehow this legislation applies to all small business; it does not. We recognize as a government that the construction industry, which has a very mobile workforce, is an industry which is different than other small business industries. As such, it often needs legislation that is tailored in a different way. This legislation is focused on small construction businesses; it is not focused on the rest of the small business community. It has nothing to do with the rest of the small businesses in Ontario. I think we owe it to the people who are listening out there to sort that out. This is about construction and construction only.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The member for Simcoe North for a response.

Applause.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Thank you for the applause. I really appreciate that when I stand up.

I want to thank the members from Welland, Eglinton-Lawrence, Durham and Guelph for their comments.

If I made it sound as though it would apply to all businesses, that's not so. The reality is, I will say again, it is for construction. But look at what construction includes: everything from the smallest renovation to heavy equipment. That's construction. It takes in hundreds of thousands of workers in the province of Ontario. It's the backbone of our economy. Quite frankly, it has a huge impact on the economy of the province.

If you think this is not going to drive it underground, you're kidding yourselves. There's going to be more and more people working underground because a lot of the companies will just fold now. They'll just fold. All this \$11,000 average increase is, for me, is another cash grab. For the guy who wasn't going to raise your taxes, every time you turn around you find another thousand dollars here or thousand dollars there that costs companies or small businesses money. That's what we're seeing here. You know what? I'm going to reiterate again that our party absolutely opposes this legislation.

We are completely in support of the CFIB. I have a lot of respect for the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. They do their job. They notify their members and their members get back to us. That's what they are supposed to do. They do their job properly. They consult with their members. That's more than can be said for the Minister of Labour, who didn't consult with the CFIB. He just went ahead and smiled and said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm going to go ahead and do it anyway." That's the reality.

As far as we're concerned, this is poor legislation. But at least you can save face by consulting properly, having good committee hearings across this province, not time-allocating this bill this week and sweeping it under the carpet overnight. Let's consult with the public.

If they really mean what they say, they will have consultations across this province and committee hearings, and they will not time-allocate this legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos: Thank you kindly, Speaker.

As labour critic for the NDP, I want to indicate clearly our support for the proposition that more workers, rather than fewer workers, should be entitled to access to WSIB coverage. The proposition that there are 90,000 workers in construction, in building trades, who aren't covered by WSIB is in and of itself a shocking observation.

The Minister of Community and Social Services briefly made reference to the history of WSIB workers' comp—the trade-off. It's a historic trade-off and it's unique to enlightened jurisdictions. What WSIB workers' comp guarantees is that regardless of who's at fault for an injury—oh, and I can go on at length about the argument—

Mr. John O'Toole: There's the right to sue.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Somebody said, "There's the right to sue," somebody from the Conservative ranks. I'll address that in short order.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Of course you do. Mr. O'Toole is on record now arguing that the right to sue is paramount.

The WSIB is a no-fault system. You've got to understand that what it means is that any worker who is covered by WSIB is entitled to compensation regardless of who's at fault. As I say, I am prepared to make lengthy arguments about the fact that all workplace injuries can be traced back to somebody in a position of responsibility. There are no workplace injuries that were not preventable. I say it's an important thing that the worker not have that burden of proving negligence on the part of the employer.

Look what happens when you don't have WSIB workers' comp coverage. A worker can, of course, sue. Have you sued anybody lately, Speaker, never mind a wealthy employer? Come on. Bay Street's just crowded with lawyers who are, again, loading up on the Montblanc pens—I get to use this line again—and the Mercedes-Benz 600 series and the Prada shoes—Prada, is that right?—and the Lou Myles or the Harry Rosen suits. I don't know what Harry Rosen looks like, for Pete's sake, but I know that rich lawyers buy suits there. Well, they make a fortune off of defending the corporations from these types of things.

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Look, suing somebody is an incredibly expensive, lengthy and arduous process, and you also have to prove negligence. That's not to say that the employer wasn't negligent, but you have to prove it. That's a huge burden for somebody whose life has already been shattered.

You see the injuries, as I had occasion to see around here at Queen's Park with politicians; there's the occasional bruised ego and paper cut. But we're talking about people in the construction industry who are exposed to risk. Remember the workers painting the underside of the Garden City Skyway? There's a monument to them at that location on the ground where they fell, ending their lives. You know that the psychological component of

living with pain, of living with the frustration of not being able to work, is a huge burden. The injuries imposed upon workers damage not only them and their bodies but damage their families and their communities, and create untold burdens that are carried and borne not just by the injured worker but by so many around them.

You see, this is a matter of social policy. I would advocate a universal accident and sickness plan. I wouldn't have much company. I might have a few people agreeing with me here, but I think it's just common sense that we protect as many people as possible from being forced into desperate poverty on welfare, and that's what happens to injured workers when they don't get WSIB. It's not a joke and it's not a choice. The injured worker doesn't have very many choices.

Again, the prospect, because I've had to tell people—I've talked about them before—who are usually women in the financial sector in call centres, some of which are financial institutions, so they don't have workers' comp coverage—still don't—that, regrettably, this bill won't give them coverage either. Most often they come in with carpal tunnel, and they're women a little bit younger than me, not quite my age. The bones are changing and the physical nature of the body is changing, so they become more and more susceptible to carpal tunnel with the repetitive strain working keyboards, keyboards alone. The pain of carpal tunnel is profound. You talk about, again, the incredible impact of living with pain, persistent pain, on a daily basis.

I've had the delight, I say sarcastically, of telling these workers, "Oh, you can get a lawyer and sue"—please. Then I also have to tell them that that means putting \$10,000 to \$20,000 down on the table for starters, and being put through a litany of legal procedures in a civil justice system that has become more and more complex, where the powerful litigant is more often the victor. And do you know what? I've never not told them that they should visit a litigation lawyer, but most didn't, and when they did, it didn't last very long once the litigation lawyer read them the facts of life.

So they live with carpal tunnel, the pain and the incapacity, and it gets worse. The arthritic conditions that develop when you have RSI on joints—premature arthritis. That means that these women—I refer to women, but men get it too—are never going to hold their grandkids; they're never going to take the turkey out of the oven on Thanksgiving or on Christmas Day.

Look, is our WCB system perfect? Of course not. We find ourselves, over successive governments—there's a constant tension to try to make it more responsive to the needs and the interests of the workers that it serves. But I say this: A person entitled to workers' comp, WSIB, can go to an Office of the Worker Adviser and have highly skilled advocates advocate for him or her. I don't know where there's an office of the insurance company adviser that does the same for victims of private insurance companies.

Interjection: The ombudsman.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Somebody said, "The ombudsman." Oh, for Pete's sake. Have you ever dealt with the

insurance industry ombudsman? What a fraud, what an embarrassment, what an insult to the principle of the ombudsman office. I had to deal with one of them a year and a half ago and it darn near rotted my socks. I was just embarrassed for the whole position of ombudsman. They don't deserve to be called "ombudsmen," but they are. In the private insurance industry, the insurance ombudsman is owned lock, stock and barrel by the companies and their interests. Good grief. How do private insurance companies make money? They make money by charging you the maximum amount of premiums and paying the least amount of benefits, and when they do pay benefits, they pay for the shortest period of time. It's not rocket science. So I reject, on behalf of the New Democrats, the proposition that private insurers can replace a broad-based, large-risk pool of publicly operated workers' compensation insurance.

I also reject the proposition that workers should be left to their own devices vis-à-vis using the courts to litigate or sue. Let's understand this as well, the consumer is at risk when they hire or retain contractors—construction, building tradespeople—in their home, for instance, or in a small business. They're a risk because if the worker isn't covered, if the independent operator isn't covered under workers' comp, then they, of course, retain the right to sue. So that's the other side of the equation. When I've got people working on my home where I know there's the risk of some liability on my part, I want to make sure that they've got workers' comp. Wouldn't you? It's only prudent. I want to see a system where the largest numbers of workers possible have access to workers' compensation.

OHIP? OHIP doesn't cut it. OHIP has nothing to do with and no interest in replacing economic loss—none whatsoever. The argument is made that this is a difficult time, tough times. Of course they're tough times. That's when workers will take on work that they may know, in their hearts and in their minds, isn't as safe as it ought to be, but they're desperate for money and they take on that work. In tough economic times, those who would abuse the system and operate underground will be more attractive to potential consumers than those who play by the rules.

I've got the letter from Judith Andrew. I've known Ms. Andrew for a long time. I don't think she likes me a whole lot. I can't be certain about that, but I just—look, not everybody likes me. I understand. I understand that not everybody likes me. Ms. Andrew and I have crossed paths many, many times, and I just feel a little bit of a chill. There's never been an embrace. I have feelings, too. I cry real tears. People don't understand that. Just because you're a member of the Legislature, that doesn't mean you have a thick, thick skin. You can be a very sensitive, tender sort of person. So Ms. Andrew—I can't control her feelings about me or about the things I believe in, and she's entitled to do what she does. She's paid a great deal to do it, and I think that's one of the reasons why it's important to have committee hearings, because I think the air has to be cleared around some of

the issues as to cost and as to the breadth of this legislation, because I say that we in the NDP are concerned about the narrow scope of the legislation.

There's some stuff in here, in this short bill, that's more than a little bit confusing. You have to read it over and over again. One discovers that independent operators who work in construction work, which is defined as "new construction work," are covered by the legislation, but proprietors who perform no construction work, other than exempt home renovation work, are exempt. Home renovation work is defined as being "an existing private residence ... occupied by the person who directly retains the independent operator"

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I'll join the list of questioners, like Howard Hampton, who ask, how is roofing a new house, a new construction, any more or less dangerous than roofing my old house on Bald Street? Some of the people here have put on roofs. I've done one roof in my life. I was never so scared. I was on hands and knees. It was scary up there. I watched roofers like gazelles, jumping from eave to eave and dancing their ladders across the side of the house on my old two-and-a-half-storey house, my old, old house in Welland, never mind single-storey. How is roofing on an already-built house any less dangerous than roofing in a new construction? That's a question that I think people would want to put to the government during the course of committee hearings.

Is this an effort to exempt mom-and-poppers? Is this the purpose? Is this an effort to exempt mom-and-poppers? Why, down where I come from, as many mom-and-poppers, small roofing companies, do new home construction as big firms. We don't have that many big roofing firms. They tend to be small, localized. You guys know that. It's the same in your communities. They tend to be small, local firms. I don't know, but having done it once, and only once, I think roofing can be a potentially dangerous occupation.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I think I've spent more time on roofs than Peter has.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Ms. Sandals has spent more time on roofs than I have. That may well be, and I will not take that any further, ma'am.

I question, as Howard Hampton did: Is installing the fenestration in a newly built home or a home that is being currently constructed any less or more dangerous than installing the fenestration in an old home like mine, for instance? I don't think so. So, for the life of me, I don't understand the distinction being made here. If it's an effort to exempt mom-and-poppers, then why aren't mom-and-poppers in new construction exempt? I think it's an artificial line and it begs questions.

The other problem—I raised this with the parliamentary assistant, and I compliment him, because he has been carrying this bill through debate here in the Legislature and has been present during all of the debate on behalf of the minister. I appreciate that. That's a parliamentary convention that I have great regard for, and the parliamentary assistant will undoubtedly be working with the bill through committee.

The exemption in subsection (5) of section 12.2 applies to "independent operators"—fair enough—"who perform no construction work other than exempt home renovation work." I think I understand what that means, but in the last year or in the last two years or in the last three years? If you did a new home three years ago but you haven't for three years, are you still exempt? If you promise, if you do the "cross my heart and hope to die" promise that you'll never do new home construction again, are you exempted because then you're only a renovator? It's just a very untenable and unworkable definition that I believe is a flaw in the legislation.

Let me make this perfectly clear: The New Democrats will be voting for this bill on second reading, of course. New Democrats support the bill's proposition. We have concerns about what we see as some language defects in the bill that are going to cause grief, going to cause problems, if they are not addressed. And, far more fundamentally, we have concern that while this bill could well address the needs of 90,000 workers in construction, in building trades, there remain multiples of that out there working in our communities, suffering workplace injuries, who still aren't covered by workers' compensation, by WSIB. All of the arguments for covering construction workers who are independent operators of small companies with WSIB apply to those other workers too. End of story.

I see this as a desirable social goal. The tragedy of a worker suffering an injury in the workplace and simply being left to his or her own devices for the rest of their life, literally, is precisely the tragedy that no civilized society can afford to bear. We mentioned already that the larger the risk pool and the more broadly distributed is the risk, the less per capita cost is involved. This is something that private insurance can never, ever do. Private insurance is horrible at containing costs other than through not paying benefits, not paying out on policies. They do very little damage mitigation. In a workers' compensation system you have the capacity to identify workplace practises that lead to injury, workplace locations that lead to injury, workplace types that lead to injury, and then you can start to address those because the real goal here—this hasn't been mentioned often enough—is building a system for workers in WSIB or workers' compensation, where the goal is, of course, fair compensation should they be injured, and more importantly the prevention of injuries and workplace diseases.

You, Speaker, as the member for Hamilton Centre, in your work with firefighters and the cancers and diseases associated with Plastimet-type fires, know this full well. The goal of a comprehensive WSIB/workers' comp system is to reduce and eliminate workplace injuries, deaths and assaults, and I believe that we can do it. We can only do it for every worker if every worker is encompassed in the system. I, for one, have far too much regard for working women and men—and I have worked a whole lot with the building trades, with people in construction, and their unions—far too much regard for them, to ever want to see them denied fair compensation in the event that they get injured and denied a system that

will hopefully, especially for the youngest of them, prevent those injuries in the first place.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Reza Moridi: It's my pleasure to rise in this House and contribute to the discussion on Bill 119, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997. This act, if it passes the House, is going to provide mandatory insurance coverage for construction workers.

As we know, there is no workplace without risk. Every workplace carries certain risks and, of course, some workplaces carry a higher risk than others. Even our workplace in this House carries a risk. So we need to provide insurance to cover the risk, the injury of workers. The construction industry is one of those workplaces where the risk, actually, is one of the highest. Apparently, people in the fishing industry carry much higher risk than others. In the old days, miners carried the highest risk among all professions, but these days I think fishery workers carry high risk.

In any case, this bill provides insurance coverage for construction workers and I think it is the right bill and it provides coverage for at least tens of thousands of workers in this province. We provide insurance coverage for very many workers. Why not include construction workers within this WSIB package?

WSIB, like our national health system, is one of the assets of this province. People from other countries look at our insurance coverage which is provided by government and they consider this actually one of our assets, and I think it's time now for us, as a province, to provide that coverage for our construction industry as well.

When people talk about the cost of this insurance, it's not actually the expenditures. When a company pays for its workers to be covered under insurance coverage, that is actually investment; it's going to add to the productivity of the workers at the end. So it will contribute to the bottom line of the companies as well.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: It's always worth listening to the member for Welland, with the experience he brings to the debate in the Legislature here. I'm surprised that he and Judith Andrew don't get along better because they're still both very passionate people.

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Now to the bill, Bill 119: If you look at the explanatory section, it's kind of unusual. I'm not sure why this is in here, actually: "However, mandatory insurance coverage and the registration requirement do not apply to these categories of persons if their only construction work is home renovation work performed in specified circumstances."

I'm always concerned that they give the illusion or the impression, as the member from Welland has pointed out, and they don't deliver.

I would hope that they have hearings on this, because everyone in this Legislature wants workers who are employed by large corporations to be properly covered, and that would be our position as well—because, really,

we know that WSIB is a tax on payroll. The whole idea, if it's well run—that's a debate for another day. Mahoney and his friends over there have spent a fortune. These guys are making \$400,000 a year, and they have a huge liability. I think this is a tax grab. The WSIB has a huge unfunded liability.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: The minister over there has spoken several times, and I'm afraid I might ask for a night session, because she doesn't know much about the bill. You know nothing about WSIB. You should be quiet, otherwise—

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: No, no. She has challenged me several times in an area that I actually worked in.

I think this is a tax grab by the Liberals to take small business by the scruff of the neck and shake every dollar out of their pockets. That's what it's about.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: Indeed, I was listening to the member from Welland. It was interesting growing up in the south end of Peterborough. I remember Wilson Plumptre Roofing. It was a family-owned business, with Mr. Plumptre not only helping his own family, he took in his grandkids to help them, roofing in the hottest days in July and August, and working in January and February on those roofs. That's tough, tough work. As the member for Welland said, a lot of us, of course, have never had that experience. Four years ago, I had to hire his nephew Currie Plumptre, the second generation of roofers. There was a problem with our roof, and we had to call him in to put a new roof on our home between Christmas and New Year's, when I know the Conservatives would all be at the Albany Club for those post-Christmas, pre-New Year's parties. Here was Currie Plumptre and his team putting that roof on our home in Peterborough four years ago. He bought the shingles from IKO, another good company down in Marmora, Ontario, where the people go in that mine down there and get out those special pieces of silica to go on those shingles—and Currie and his team being there to put that on. It was a cold, cold time four years ago, well below zero. He was up there putting those shingles on there. He's the kind of guy who will probably be protected under Bill 119. He's a solid citizen in the riding of Peterborough who likes to bid on those municipal contracts, and now he'll finally get a chance, because everybody who's bidding on those municipal contracts will be paying WSIB to equalize the playing field. That's something those small roofing contractors have been asking for for a long, long time.

We look forward to this bill going out for committee hearings, and we'll get the input from a wide variety of citizens across Ontario.

Mr. Mike Colle: Bring Currie the roofer in.

Mr. Jeff Leal: We will bring in Currie. I'd like to bring him to Queen's Park, because he would like to observe the proceedings here.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Not Joe the plumber.

Mr. Jeff Leal: And Joe the plumber, too.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I am very pleased to support Bill 119, because when I hear members from the other party—and I very much support what the MPP from Welland said. It's not often that I support what he's saying, but having worked in this area for so many years, I saw a story that is so sad. I'm just thinking about Julio in my riding who used to work for a company, and the company moved to BC to do some work in preparation for the exhibition there, and he was very badly injured. They told him, "You're not covered, so you're on your own." This gentleman was on welfare for four years. He couldn't work. He was very, very injured—four years on welfare. Imagine this person, with a work ethic that you wouldn't believe, a Portuguese gentleman, and he could not believe that he was left on welfare for four years. He came to see me. I put him in contact with the worker adviser and finally, after years, he was compensated under workers' compensation. His employer had told him that he had coverage, and at the end of the day the coverage was not there. But in the end, he was able to be covered under workers' compensation.

When I was a nurse in the operating room, this other gentleman came. He had had a bad accident and we had to amputate his two hands. So imagine this young fellow, 25 years old: What would have happened if he did not have workers' compensation coverage? Because of that, he was able to go on with life, to be retrained, to have two artificial hands, and this gentleman today is a very productive person in the community. Because of those two examples, I'm going to support Bill 119.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The member for Welland for a response.

Mr. Peter Kormos: In a modest two minutes I want to underscore one more reality. We've already mentioned it. The minister made reference to it: a client she had as a nurse—a young person, a young worker. Disproportionately, young workers suffer more injuries. They're not as familiar with workplace safety regimens. They tend—dare I say it?—to be younger and fearless and enjoy that sense of immortality that youth brought us and that aging denies us. Also, when you're talking about student workers, you're talking about people who will go out there and take jobs because they need the money, who will go out there and do what they're told to do because they don't want to risk losing the job, and they expose themselves in ways that more experienced, seasoned workers wouldn't. So if we're talking about ensuring that 90,000 more workers in the construction industry have workers' compensation coverage, we're talking about benefiting the welfare of a whole lot of young people. It's always a tragedy when a worker is maimed or when his life is stolen from him in the workplace. But I've got to tell you, when you have a young student who is unfamiliar with the culture and milieu of, let's say, a construction site but he's doing his very best, and he is planning on any number of careers or has great talent that he or she can offer us in so many other ways, and loses his or her life, it's a crime. When

they lose hands or limbs or legs or their faculties with brain and head injuries, it's as tragic. So that's why it's surely not a bad thing; it's a good thing to ensure that as many of these construction workers as possible have workers' compensation coverage.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): It being almost 6 o'clock, I will now declare this House adjourned, to resume tomorrow, Tuesday, November 4, at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1758.

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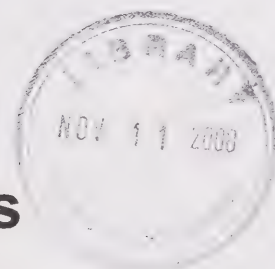
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Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Première session, 39^e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)



Tuesday 4 November 2008

Mardi 4 novembre 2008

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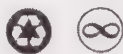
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 4 November 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 4 novembre 2008

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a Baha'i prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET MEASURES AND INTERIM APPROPRIATION ACT, 2008 (NO. 2)

LOI DE 2008 SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES ET L'AFFECTATION ANTICIPÉE DE CRÉDITS (NO 2)

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 29, 2008, on the motion for second reading of Bill 114, An Act respecting Budget measures, interim appropriations and other matters, to amend the Ottawa Congress Centre Act and to enact the Ontario Capital Growth Corporation Act, 2008 / Projet de loi 114, Loi concernant les mesures budgétaires, l'affectation anticipée de crédits et d'autres questions, modifiant la Loi sur le Centre des congrès d'Ottawa et édictant la Loi de 2008 sur la Société ontarienne de financement de la croissance.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to the order of the House dated November 3, 2008, I am now required to put the question.

On October 27, Mr. Bentley moved second reading of Bill 114, An Act respecting Budget measures, interim appropriations and other matters, to amend the Ottawa Congress Centre Act and to enact the Ontario Capital Growth Corporation Act, 2008. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded division being required, this vote is deferred to after question period this morning.

Vote deferred.

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA SÉCURITÉ PROFESSIONNELLE ET L'ASSURANCE CONTRE LES ACCIDENTS DU TRAVAIL

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 3, 2008, on the motion for second reading of Bill 119, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 / Projet de loi 119, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate? The member from Simcoe—Grey.

Interjection: Soon to be minister.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I could use the promotion but I'd rather be on this side of the House at this moment when we're debating Bill 119, because I'm sorry that I have to join in this debate this morning. It's an unnecessary bill. It's a bill that will require, basically, white-collar workers in small construction firms in Ontario for the first time ever to have to purchase or pay workplace health and safety—WCB we used to call it—insurance premiums. So the name of the bill is the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, Bill 119. This bill, I say sarcastically, must be Mr. McGuinty's way of welcoming in Small Business Month, which is this month. It's a shame that the way he has chosen to do it is certainly not cause for celebration.

Of my 18 years here in this House representing the people of Simcoe—Grey, and prior to that Simcoe West—we get a lot of correspondence, but the most correspondence, and you've heard me say this many times, that I've had from constituents and concerned Ontarians was when the German shepherd was dragged behind a pickup truck a couple of years ago and again when a dog in Toronto was hurt when his ears were cut to make him look more vicious; I think it was last year or two years ago also. But this is number three, especially hearing from the small business community, in terms of the numbers of e-mails I have been receiving over the last two weeks. Now the letters are starting to come in. On the weekend we were in Port Hope listening to the folks at a town hall meeting. Many, many small business people were there and they wanted to know what this bill was about.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has done a good job of sending out a newsletter informing their membership of some 47,000 small businesses, I think; I'm not sure of the exact number. Clearly, those small business people are figuring out that for the first time ever they may have to pay premiums—or they will have to pay premiums—that on average will be up to \$11,000 for small businesses. For many of those small business people that \$11,000 will come out of the owner's salary or take-home pay because there's nowhere else to take the money from.

I'll read some e-mails here this morning, actual e-mails from my constituents that have asked me to bring their points to the government's attention in the hope that the government will listen. At the very least, they would like this bill to go to committee so that they will have more time to bring representation.

I just say to the government at the beginning, who wants this bill? Obviously, it's a tax grab at a time when, once again, Mr. McGuinty said he wouldn't raise taxes. It's the worst possible time in our economic history, of modern times in Ontario and Canada and North America, and indeed the world, to bring forward a tax grab like this.

Nobody wants it in the small business community. Absolutely no one that actually owns, or derives their income primarily from, a small business has said they want this. I mean, employees are already covered with the mandatory workers' compensation, or WSIB, premiums. Even if your company doesn't pay and then you get hurt on the job, the way the system works in Ontario is that you will receive insurance coverage anyway, and those benefits that you require to get you back on your feet or that you require to live.

Most small business operators, owners—corporate officers, as they are called—have had, just out of common sense, private insurance that gives them 24/7 coverage, 365 days a year, which is more coverage than they'll get when they pay the new WSIB premiums. And the private sector coverage is better coverage and less expensive.

So this totally is devoid of common sense and support. Again, I can't help but wonder why the government's doing it. I know the big unions and some of the big, big businesses like it, and I would hope that they're not just doing it for them, because it doesn't affect them; it affects the mom-and-pop shops, the electrical shop and the construction shop, where often it's a father and son or a family business.

The bill also imposes a requirement to obtain a clearance certificate. You pretty well always had to do that in the past. For those at home who don't know what that is, it's a proof that the companies you're dealing with, your subcontractors, have WSIB registration and they're complying with all their orders and paying their premiums. You have to get this certificate from your subcontractors before construction begins and you retain the certificate for three years in case of an audit.

0910

Now, one good thing about this bill, I guess—because they really would be subject to the wrath of Ontarians if

this bill were to apply to homeowners who retained contractors to do home renovation work, but so far they're exempt, but Big Brother is creeping in. I just moved seven houses, from one end of my subdivision in Wasaga Beach to the other end, and I've been trying to get electricians and carpenters and various people in. So far I don't have to pay their premiums, but you never know the way this government goes.

You're getting people where the most damage that's going to happen to them is paper cuts, because they are white-collar workers for the most part, the owners. As we see in a lot of the e-mails, site management is done by site managers and not often by the owners in these cases. You're requiring these people who already have insurance coverage to pay up to an \$11,000 tax.

There are also very, very severe penalties for anyone who doesn't pay their \$11,000-a-year tax to the government. They're dramatic new penalties that we hadn't seen before.

The government says that the reason they want the bill is to crack down on the underground economy. This will create a bigger underground economy. You're not going to pop your head up and pay anything or register for anything now that premiums have gone through the roof—unnecessary premiums. That just defies common sense. We've seen this happen before when governments got too tax-greedy; that's what created the underground economy in the first place. There's no way you're going to pop your head up under this new system. Your employees will be covered anyway. You'll let the big businesses, who think the bill is going to do them some good and take the pressure off them—it's going to put more pressure on them. Where I come from, people usually offer you cash as it is now to build your deck or renovate your house. It'll just get worse. Why pop your head up? You'll be subject to inspections and audits and all kinds of things, and you won't make a living anyway, so you might as well take your chances in the underground economy. That's exactly what will happen.

According to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, as I said, the average tax hike on small and medium-sized businesses caused by this bill will be \$11,000 annually. They question why the government would do this, in this type of economy especially. The WSIB already has significant tools in the legislation to crack down on the underground economy in a legitimate way. If my party were in government, we'd encourage them, as we always did, to continue to do that the best they can. But bringing in a new tax will drive things in the opposite direction.

I'll just start to read some of the e-mails in the time I have left, just to emphasize how truly unpopular this bill is in my riding, and I suspect it's equally unpopular in Liberal members' ridings. In fact, in those Liberal-held ridings, constituents must be in complete bewilderment, because I'm sure you didn't talk about bringing in an \$11,000 tax during the all-candidates' meetings in the election last year. I'm sure people wouldn't have voted for you if they had known this was exactly what you

were going to do, especially after having two elections where Mr. McGuinty has clearly broken his promises and brought in new taxes after each election. Here's another one. This time it happens to be in one of the government agencies—which is the government; the government controls the WSIB, sets all the rules and appoints the board and chairman. This is the government.

From Simcoe—Grey, the first e-mail I have is from Rick Fess of Doner-Hosley Insurance, which is located on Victoria Street, the main street of Alliston. Rick writes:

“Hi, Jim. Please do whatever you can to stop the current WSIB legislation now in second reading from going any further. This is just a disguised tax grab for the WSIB to further hurt small businesses. Ask the Liberals if they don't think enough jobs have been lost in Ontario already without this legislation taking money directly out of the pockets of small businesses. Thank you.”

Maybe during the questions and comments part after my remarks, one of the Liberal members could answer Rick's question.

The next e-mail is from John McFarland, a master electrician at Nu-Tek Electric in Alliston, and I think he was president of our Rotary Club for quite some time.

“Hi Jim,

“I've been following the tactics for the Liberal government, especially Labour Minister Fonseca and how he has no regard for input in the matter of mandatory WSIB coverage from independent small business. All he can listen to is the large unions who fund their agendas.

“I urge you, Jim, to do all you can as opposition party and my MPP to stop the ramming of this bill down small businesses' throats. Send this bill to committee hearings to be fair.

“I have included a copy of CFIB's latest letter to its membership.

“Thank you for your consideration,

“John McFarland—Nu-Tek Electric, Alliston.”

I've got another e-mail here, this time from Collingwood. It's from Madeline Quinn; she sent this to all MPPs in the Ontario Legislature.

“To members of provincial Parliament:

“I would include 'honourable' but what you are doing has no honour in it.

“The WSIB mandatory coverage legislation is by far the most detrimental, least-thought-out, ill-conceived proposed bill aimed at independent operators and companies in construction. The additional cost (approximately \$11,000 each) to owners, officers and directors of a small business may very well be enough to drive a lot of businesses further underground and/or out of business. What part of this do the Liberals not get?

“The state of the economy, currently being very volatile and shaky has people cutting back and rethinking what they will spend and how many persons they can employ going forward. What we definitely don't need is more pressure and costs to small business which would also add to unemployment if this bill goes through. WSIB, if anything, needs to be better regulated and not a

self-governed monopoly. Perhaps you should spend more time checking the internal problems of WSIB and less time mandating small businesses with additional costs.

“I am a member of CFIB and thank God they are there to lobby on behalf of small business and not as is clearly the case of this proposed bill, by the Liberals that support big business and unions. This bill receiving first and second reading in two days smells really rotten. If you think no one is paying attention, think again.

“Madeline Quinn

“Assante Financial Management

“Branch manager

“Collingwood, Ontario.”

I was careful to ask all of these people in my response to their e-mails whether I could bring up their e-mails and overwhelmingly everybody said yes; nobody said no. They wanted their e-mails read into the record and they want the government to listen.

I have another e-mail, from Don McLaren of Phelpston. He sent this e-mail to my colleague from Simcoe North, Garfield Dunlop, and me.

“Honourable members, please review again this letter from Judith Andrew, VP Ontario, CFIB, to Peter Fonseca.

“We don't need additional dues and red tape from WSIB in any sector in Ontario.

“As owners we have carried personal coverage for years and need to continue doing so for 24-hour coverage.

“Thanks

“Don McLaren

“McLaren Equipment Ltd.

“Horseshoe Valley Road

“Barrie (Phelpston) Ontario.”

That's not all; I have more. This e-mail comes from a chartered accountant in Tottenham:

“Dear Mr. Wilson:

“I am writing to you as my MPP to ask you to address the matter of the WSIB mandatory coverage legislation that is presently being tabled by Honourable Peter Fonseca. The added financial burden of this legislation will make it increasingly difficult for small and medium-sized businesses to remain in business—especially in these (potentially) recessionary times.”

That's Marino Verecke from Tottenham, chartered accountant.

I have another e-mail here, from the Beild House Country Inn and Spa—a beautiful spot—in Collingwood. It says:

“Hello Jim:

“I have been urged by the Ontario Accommodation Association to contact my MPP with regards to current legislation before the Legislature regarding the extension of WSIB payments on behalf of owners and directors in the construction industry.

“While, of course, this would not cover our business now, it would over time no doubt expand to tourism. As you know, the tourism industry is hurting badly in this province at the same time that government is reducing

funding in this area. This, in combination with the added costs that have been associated with the changes in government regulation with regards to fire codes, would be an additional burden our industry can ill-afford.

"I urge you to speak out loudly that this additional cost to business at this time is ill advised. I think we are overregulated as it is and do not wish to see more.

"Kindest regards,

"Bill Barclay

"Beild House Country Inn and Spa

"Collingwood, Ontario."

Just the last one for this morning, and I hope many more, if this bill goes to committee on the next reading. This particular e-mail is from Elmvale. It says:

"Dear Honourable Jim Wilson:

"As local business owners in your constituency, I would like to draw attention to the proposed reforms brought by the Ministry of Labour relating to workplace insurance. Our specific concern related to mandatory coverage through WSIB as small business owners. This directly affects our ability to continue to operate our businesses as it would require us to pay an estimated \$22,000 every year. We operate a successful new home construction business in your constituency, and we already are seeing a decline in business as a result of the economy. We already fully report and submit premiums for all of our employees to ensure that they are fully covered. We feel this proposed mandated legislation unfairly punishes those of us who operate our business completely aboveboard, reporting and remitting all of our payroll, income and sales taxes, where those who continue to evade their taxes in our industry still won't contribute their share under this legislation. This legislation doesn't consider that we already cover ourselves with private insurance, with much better coverage and lower premiums than WSIB is offering. We also don't believe we would benefit from any mandatory coverage under the current system as we most likely wouldn't qualify for payouts as employers. If this legislation truly was for the safety and insurance purposes, they should allow owners to show proof of private insurance. Please consider carefully these proposed changes that would require us to have mandatory WSIB coverage as owners.

"Thank you for your attention to this important matter;

"Kerry and Brent Langman

"Advantage Homes

"Elmvale, Ontario"

0920

If this bill is going to hurt small business so much, as we see from the letters I've just read from small business operators, who on earth benefits from this legislation? Well, it's not small business. The only people to benefit are big business and big unions, as I've said. We all know who the big unions are in this province. They're the ones who make up the infamous Working Families Coalition.

For those who don't recall, the WFC, the Working Families Coalition, was formed in 2003 with the primary purpose of defeating the then-incumbent PC government.

It's an Ontario non-share capital corporation with a stated purpose of running a multimedia election advertising campaign, including television advertising, using the catchphrase in 2003, "Not this time, Ernie." Then, in 2007, the coalition grew to include 10 unions and once again attacked the PC Party, and this time the NDP, using an aggressive advertising campaign with the catchphrase, "You decide." This group's activities are an unprecedented third party intervention into Ontario politics.

Which unions make up the Working Families Coalition? In 2003, it comprised the Ontario building trades council, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association and the Ontario Nurses' Association. In the lead-up to the 2007 election, it grew and included the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association; the Canadian Auto Workers; the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation; the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Local 128; the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers; Millwrights; the International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 793; Painters District Council 46; the Ontario Pipe Trades Council; the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers—about five different locals there, and joined again in late 2007 for the campaign—the International Union of Elevator Constructors; along with the International Association of Bridge, Structural Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers; the Ontario Pipe Trades Council; and there are about four more on the list.

The point being, these are the unions that will benefit from this. The people who will pay the \$11,000—and in one case, in my riding, as the e-mail said, \$22,000, because there are two business owners who will have to pay the new premiums—don't get additional coverage; they get worse coverage than they do under private insurance. They'll be paying two insurances. They're not even sure, under this legislation, whether, as employers, they'll ever be able to claim under the insurance. The only ones who seem to be benefiting are those who opposed the PCs and the NDP—the PCs in the 2003 election and the PCs and the NDP.

The Working Families Coalition—a nice, catchy title for a bunch of people who hate the PCs and the NDP, and who seem to be more often than not receiving legislation and regulations, especially the journeymen-to-apprentice ratio that I keep bringing up and my colleagues keep bringing up on this side of the House that needs to be changed in order to create jobs and apprentice positions for young people in this province. They're the ones, the Working Families Coalition, that benefit from the status quo. They raised \$5 million for the Liberals in 2007, and they are sure making sure that they're getting payback at this time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's my pleasure to make a few remarks on the speech by the member from Simcoe-Grey. I have to say that, although I understand where the member comes from, I look at this situation, this bill, from an opposite perspective. From my perspective, this

bill is about bringing new opportunities for workers who are not currently covered by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board or the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act into the fold.

I'll have an opportunity to make more detailed remarks a little later on, but it is unacceptable that workers in the province of Ontario are in a situation where they are not covered by the no-fault insurance system, if you want to call it that, because, in fact, that's what it is. It takes away the workers' need to prove that the employer was responsible for an injury that was sustained on the job. What this bill simply does is to say that there is a group of workers who currently are not covered by that system, in fact a small group of workers who are not covered, when you consider that some 30% of workers in Ontario are not covered by WSIB. New Democrats believe that those workers have the right, like every other worker, to be covered by an insurance system that gives them the basic right to claim benefits and opportunities for rehabilitation and to have the opportunity to get back to work once they begin to recover from their injury. All of these pieces are what are currently denied to some 90,000 workers that this bill specifically covers. There are probably another 200,000 workers outside of these workers, or maybe more, that are still not covered by the WSIB, and we need to get at that.

We believe this is the right thing to do for these workers. In fact, we believe this is the right thing to do for all workers. I look forward to putting some more remarks on the record very shortly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'm really pleased to have the opportunity to enter into this debate, and specifically make some comments in relation to what the member for Simcoe-Grey has said, and also the member for Hamilton Centre.

I certainly concur with the member for Hamilton Centre that this is an important step forward. The health and safety of Ontario workers is our number one priority, and clearly with this bill we are taking steps to promote health and safety in the Ontario construction industry by proposing to extend coverage of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act of 1997 to individuals working in construction in categories currently not covered. So this is an important step forward.

It also levels the playing field. It puts those employers who play by the rules at a competitive disadvantage if employers that are not insuring coverage are also bidding for work in their community. So it's the right time to act, to help protect legitimate construction employers from unfair competition from the underground economy. Of course, we know that the WSIB is in fact losing significant revenue through the underground economy.

We also have considerable time to ensure that we get the proposed amendments right in terms of the fact that this act will not come into effect until the year 2012. So there will be a three-year period to allow time for the

WSIB to discuss implementation with the important stakeholders.

The member for Simcoe-Grey has of course pointed out that home renovations are exempt, and we think that this is also a very balanced approach to this issue.

Therefore, I'm going to be supporting this particular bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Toby Barrett: This new WSIB policy is a terrible policy. This bill has to be killed before it kills small business.

Just to follow up on the comments from Jim Wilson, the member for Simcoe-Grey, and the comments by our critic, Bob Bailey, the member for Sarnia-Lambton: We know that Ontario is now a have-not province and we're in the middle of an economic crisis. We have no business bringing in a job-killing policy right now, when small business needs all the help it can get.

The member for Simcoe-Grey read into the record a number of e-mails. I've received e-mails as well. This is from some greenhouse operators down Jarvis way who've written to me: "[T]he Liberal government is yet again at its little games to bankrupt this province by trying to take more from the small business.

"You must on our behalf"—referring to me—"insist that this legislation concerning WSIB ... must be put through due process with the people of this province. It seems that this notorious Liberal government has no regard for the very people who keep this province moving at the moment."

I received an e-mail from a large manufacturer up Princeton and Burford way:

"This is a terribly flawed piece of legislation. Small business owners all over the country, but in Ontario in particular, are being hammered by all kinds of additional expense, and we absolutely cannot afford to be mandated another cost such as this.... There must be hearings held to bring some common sense to the process."

I received an e-mail from a chartered accountant who represents a number of people in the construction industry—and I'm talking about small construction. It would be a fellow, his brother-in-law, they would have a labourer perhaps, who are doing roofing and interior doors. Perhaps the WSIB would be better off to ensure the validity of his current claims and benefit payouts.

0930

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question and comment.

Mr. John O'Toole: The member from Simcoe-Grey has always paid very close attention to his constituents and to his riding and the area that he represents. I know in the recreation field and the quality-of-life homes that are being built there, he knows of the small business that will be threatened by this unnecessary tax on jobs.

In fact, if you want to look at the thrust of the bill, the sentiment of making sure that every employee is covered by some sort of insurance in the tragic event that they could have a workplace accident is something where

we're proud of our record on that file. But this is small independent operators who do much of the work—and many of them are skilled tradespeople and have coverage of their own—who now are going to be mandated. This mandate is going to override any other requirement, and the certificates that are necessary to have are clearly the Liberal solution to job creation, but in fact it's job destruction. Because the more red tape you introduce and the more tax burden you introduce for small people—and the member for Simcoe–Grey mentioned it—the more you drive much of the economy underground. That's exactly what we don't want.

If you look at the evidence in the economy today, many of their policies and strategies—and it's not just the health tax that we like to talk about often; it's the overburdensome regulation and the bureaucratic implementation of these things, a lack of consultation. And yet they like to claim that they consult with people. But clearly, I am on the side of the member for Simcoe–Grey, and the opposition's position is, let's make sure that the people that are required to pay, pay, but let's not start putting more tax—\$11,000 on small business is going to kill that business.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I will return to the member for Simcoe–Grey, who has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I agree with what my colleague Mr. O'Toole has just said in terms of, why at this time? Why even worry small business at this time, and medium-sized business, if you are not going to enact it, as the member for Oak Ridges–Markham reminded us, until 2012? This is not the time to be adding additional stress to the people that make up over 80% of the jobs in the province of Ontario—the mom-and-pop shops on our Main Streets with less than 10 employees. That's who you are making pay here. Most of them already have insurance coverage.

My father ran a tavern along with his father, Bill Wilson, and a small grocery store and gas station in Loretto, Ontario, in the south end of my riding. Prior to that, my father owned Jack Wilson Appliances in Barrie, Newmarket and Alliston. He was the owner and he wouldn't qualify for a payout from WSIB, or WCB as it was called back then—even though you are now going to make him pay premiums—if he were still alive and in business. That's disgraceful.

First of all, he'd freak out. He always sort of wondered why I was in government anyway after he went through about his 10th provincial sales tax audit and they always owed him money; he used to hate that. But at the end of the day this overburdened, overregulated—why worry them at this time? If anything, make it optional. If it's such a good thing for them, as the nanny state people around me seem to believe, then make it optional. If the WCB insurance for owners for getting a paper cut is better than what they can get on the private market and gives them the 24/7 coverage they can get on the private market at lower premiums right now, 365-day-a-year coverage, not just when they're at work—if your insurance product is better, give them an option in this leg-

islation rather than mandating it. Obviously, it isn't better. It's Big Brother, it's nanny state, and so you have to make it mandatory and shove it down their throats.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 47(c), there having been six and a half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of Bill 119, this debate stands adjourned.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to order 8(d) there is no further business this morning.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): As such, this House is in recess until 10:30 am.

The House recessed from 0936 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I would like to welcome Robert Wood to the House this morning. He is the chief financial officer for Trojan Technologies, a London-based company that is receiving the Ontario Chamber of Commerce Large Business Award tonight. Welcome, Mr. Wood.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to introduce, in the west gallery, grandparents raising grandkids: Bernadette Eaton, Sandra Schoenfeldt, Tina Bachand, Donna Bush and Betty Cornelius. These are just some of the many grandmothers who will be joining us later today.

Hon. John Milloy: I know all members would like to join me in welcoming representatives of Skills Canada–Ontario to Queen's Park today, and the seven Ontario students who will represent Canada at the WorldSkills Competition to be held in Calgary. Students with us today are Scott Blair, Stacey Dubois, Andrew Marcolin, Jamie Feenstra, Jud Tofflemire, Brian Martin and Dan Van Holst. They're also joined by representatives of Skills Canada–Ontario, Gail Smyth, Linda Barton and Gary Cronkwright, and I wish to invite all members of the assembly to a special reception at Stop 33 at Sutton Place from 3 to 5 today, to wish our Ontario competitors the best of luck.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'd like to introduce Rosemary Frei. She's the aunt of our page Willem.

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I'd like to introduce the mother and the brother of a page from my area: Julie Shen, who's the mother, and her talented young brother Philip.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of the member from Simcoe–Grey and page Emily Heffernan, we'd like to welcome her mom, Carol, and her father, Craig; her friend Wendy Kellam, her friend Jack Kellam and friend Sasha Kellam. They are in the east gallery. Welcome to Queen's Park today.

As well, on behalf of the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton and page Shaikat Khan, we would like to welcome teacher Priya Parekh, principal Dawn Addison and teacher Mrs. Eckle. The teachers and the principal are from Morning Star Middle School and will be in the public gallery today during question period. We welcome those guests as well.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Minister of Finance, and it's regarding yesterday's historic announcement that for the first time in Ontario's history we are now recipients of financial support from other provinces, through equalization. In essence, in five short years, your government has taken the engine of Canada's economy to the back of the train; we're now the caboose.

Minister, do you and your colleagues accept any degree of responsibility for the embarrassing position this province is now in: asking Newfoundland for financial help?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The state of Ontario's economy has been challenged over a number of years. We have an equalization formula that basically recognizes those who have oil versus those who don't. Over a number of years we have constantly talked about the flaws in that formula. Those flaws have been pointed out by a number of analysts. We recognize the importance of investments in fairness and working together with other governments to ensure that what continues to be the engine of the Canadian economy, Ontario, continues to be strong. We will continue to make the investments that we have made to work through these challenging times, and we look forward to working with all levels of government to ensure that we do get through these challenging times in a stronger and better fashion than we went in.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Newfoundland's Premier said he doesn't mind helping out his poor cousins in Ontario. While we appreciate the sentiment, it's hard to swallow the concept of being Newfoundland's poor cousin. That's the place you've taken us to.

You've increased program spending by nearly 50%, you've consistently spent way beyond what you've budgeted, you have the highest tax burden on investment in Canada, your effective tax rate on capital is higher than the worldwide average, and on and on. Minister, why can you not recognize, let alone acknowledge, that your policies have contributed to putting our province in this embarrassing position?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: As the headquarters to most Canadian companies, as the largest exporter in the country, as the largest growing labour force in the country, as a whole range of other factors point out, equalization doesn't reflect, in our view, the totality of the great strengths of this province. I don't think any provinces, given the circumstances that the country and the world find themselves in, should be gloating over an equation that essentially reflects resources, oil and natural gas specifically—an equation that is, in our view, fundamentally flawed.

We will continue to make the investments; we will continue to invest in our strengths to ensure that Ontario

comes out of the current global challenges stronger and better than it went in.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: The minister still has the blinders on. You and I, Speaker, know that Ontarians are a proud people. The largest province in Canada, we're used to being breadwinners in Confederation, always there to help others, not welfare recipients or whiners.

Minister, your government, during the past five years, has made deliberate choices that placed Ontario in this position, or certainly contributed to placing Ontario in this position.

Minister, instead of negotiating the amount of the welfare cheque, when will you accept responsibility and do what's necessary to put Ontario back on the road to prosperity?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I remind the Leader of the Opposition that we'll be paying ourselves. Ontario's net contribution to the federation is \$20 billion. We need a recognition on a range of issues, and hopefully the member opposite and our new 106 federal members will stand up for Ontario in terms of a fair health care transfer, equal per-capita funding, which the federal government has acknowledged is below the rest of the country. Hopefully, they will stand up and speak about the flaws in an equalization system that has yielded the kinds of results it has over the years.

There's no doubt that there are enormous challenges in the Ontario and Canadian economies. We will continue to build the vital public services that will see us through this. We will continue to invest in the Next Generation of Jobs Fund. We will continue to train our workforce to respond—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: That it's our money is surprising and disturbing. Ontarians have always been Canadians first.

Back to the Minister of Finance: What we saw yesterday from the finance minister was a disheartening sight for Ontarians—a complete lack of leadership and abject surrender. Leadership is not about admitting defeat and looking around for the consolation prize; leadership is about refusing to admit defeat, coming up with a plan to win the race and showing resolve to get there.

Minister, where is your plan to get Ontario back on top? Where is your plan to get Ontario back to its rightful place in Confederation?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We've laid out a plan that invests in infrastructure. We've laid out a plan that invests in skilled trades. We've laid out a plan that invests in innovation. And we've laid out a plan that continues to make Ontario's tax base more competitive.

There is much more to do. There is an industrial and manufacturing sector that is threatened throughout North

America. This government is responding. We will continue to respond to build on our initiatives to date. There are challenges in Ontario's economy and in the global economy, more importantly, that impact on Ontario. Our government has had a plan. That plan works. We'll adjust it as times adjust, and Ontarians will be better, stronger and prouder Canadians when we come through this, stronger than when we went in.

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The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: The message seems to be, "Deny, deny, deny the reality." You can't win the race running in the wrong direction. That's the reality. Having the highest taxes in North America on investment is going in the wrong direction. Having the highest apprenticeship ratios in Canada is going in the wrong direction. Having a jobs plan that no one qualifies for is going in the wrong direction. Bringing in a new tax on small business during an economic slowdown is going in the wrong direction. Minister, when is your government going to admit that you've made some mistakes? Take some responsibility. Do things that you can do to get Ontario back in the race.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: First of all, to suggest that Ontario has the highest corporate taxes is fiction. It's just not accurate. Number two, we moved last March to raise the small business threshold to the highest level to allow more small businesses than anywhere else in Canada to qualify for the lower tax rate, and what did that member and his party do? They voted against it. This is a complicated and challenging world environment. Ontario is caught, as are other Canadian provinces, and that will become more evident, as time goes on, in a very difficult circumstance.

The plan we've laid out is the right one. We invested, last year, \$9.9 billion in infrastructure. That's employing people. That's getting liquidity into the hands of the corporations that employ those people and it builds our productivity.

These are challenging times. The plan we've laid out is the right plan. We'll continue to work on it. We'll need a federal partner to make that a complete plan.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Repeating that tired refrain is like the hare scratching his head, wondering how the tortoise crossed the finish line ahead of him. That's the reality in this situation. A winning plan means a job creation strategy that actually brings investments and jobs back to Ontario. You haven't done that. A winning plan means refusing to tax small construction companies when they can least afford it. These are just a few examples of the many things this government could be doing to put Ontario back on top. Why are you not doing it?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I'll remind the member that in spite of the global economic challenges, Ontario has created more than 100,000 net new jobs this year. That

speaks to the real strength in our economy, which the member wants to talk down. It speaks to the diversified nature of our economy. It speaks to the new industries that are springing up in new sectors. It speaks to the investments we've made to keep existing industries competitive in spite of the enormous challenges in the world today. There is no doubt that there are challenges. The plan we've laid out involves more than \$3 billion in corporate tax cuts, every single dollar of which that member and his party voted against. Those were the specific cuts we were asked to do first.

There are huge challenges in the world economy. I expect that those challenges will become more difficult in the days and weeks ahead. We will continue to implement our plan and we will continue to address the new challenges—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Acting Premier. Last week, the Automotive Parts Manufacturers Association released an open letter stating that unless governments come up with \$1 billion in short-term loan financing, thousands of auto sector jobs will be lost in Ontario. Today we learned that October auto sales in the United States dropped by a further 35% year over year, putting more auto sector jobs at risk in Ontario. The McGuinty government had an opportunity to respond to this in its economic statement, but there was no response, simply a "You're on your own" attitude. My question is this: Why does the McGuinty government continue to refuse to provide short-term loan financing to Ontario's auto parts sector when you know that your refusal will put thousands of Ontario workers on the unemployment line?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Deputy Premier.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the Minister of Economic Development.

Hon. Michael Bryant: the letter that the member refers to is to the federal government and the provincial government. Today, there was a letter from the Canadian Manufacturing Coalition to the Prime Minister.

There's no question that the industry is looking for government partnerships where it's appropriate. I think the member would agree with me that taxpayer dollars are not the bank of last resort, but rather, we establish a program that invests in innovation. We are doing that. We are doing that through the advanced manufacturing program, one that has been in existence for some time now. It has been successful, it has leveraged more investments in those companies and it's created more jobs. But to the member's point: We will continue to work very closely with all members of the industry, whom I meet with on a regular basis, to do everything that is appropriate for the government.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: Once again, the McGuinty government continues to talk about same old, same old. The auto parts sector is not asking for an innovation strategy. They're very clear. What they require is short-term loan financing because people cannot get credit; the small manufacturers cannot get credit to carry on their operations. Instead, we get more of "You're on your own, you're on your own." This is the problem. This is going to kill more jobs.

The specific question again: Instead of talking about an innovation fund, instead of talking about something you announced three years ago, when is the McGuinty government going to provide some short-term loan financing? Or are you going to put in place a situation which results in the loss of thousands more jobs in the auto parts sector?

Hon. James J. Bradley: A month ago, Howie was against it.

Hon. Michael Bryant: It's true. One day, the leader of the New Democrat Party and other members of his caucus are against the loan program, and then the next day—now—they are suggesting that there be an open loan program with no criteria. I don't agree. The member says that the industry, in fact, is not interested in innovation. You're wrong, sir. The industry is interested in innovation because there is certainly the knowledge that driving the capacity from innovation into the businesses' core business is the way in which businesses are going to get through this challenging time. The government is there to partner with them where the criteria is met and where it's in the public interest.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: Once again, the McGuinty government wants to talk about everything other than the issue, and the issue is short-term credit. The issue is short-term financing so that manufacturers can continue to stay in business. The open letter from the Canadian manufacturers and exporters' association underlines the same theme: The letter urges governments to guarantee loans and lines of credit so that otherwise credit-worthy businesses facing the prospect of a sharp economic downturn and a sharp downturn in demand can survive.

I ask again: When is the McGuinty government going to stop talking about what it announced four years ago, which hasn't succeeded, or what it announced three years ago, which hasn't succeeded? When are you going to come to grips with the point? There are lots of manufacturers who need short-term loan financing; otherwise, they're going to go out of business and we're going to lose thousands of jobs. When are you going to respond to that issue?

Hon. Michael Bryant: Again, the member is late in the game. The government has been responding to this issue. It has a repayable loan program for up to 30% of the total eligible costs of the project, to a maximum of \$10 million. These loans are interest-free for five years, provided the company meets agreed-upon job and investment targets. It is there and it has been there. It didn't

arrive today, when the member received a letter from the Canadian Manufacturing Coalition.

By the way, the letter is to the Prime Minister of Canada. The letter is not addressed to the Premier of Ontario or copied to the Premier of Ontario or to the Minister of Finance, and it is because the manufacturing industry understands well that this government has already been in the process of assisting and enabling innovation within the industry through its loan program and through the Next Generation of Jobs Fund. We will continue to do that and we look forward to seeing what the members—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

1050

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Howard Hampton: Again: to the Acting Premier. I guess we have the answer from the McGuinty government. At a time when the auto parts sector needs short-term loan financing, the McGuinty government once again says, "You're on your own."

But I want to ask about some of the other things that have been happening. New Democrats proposed, some time ago, a Buy Ontario strategy, which would mean that subway cars, streetcars and buses that are used by municipalities in Ontario continue to be manufactured in Ontario. The McGuinty Liberals have said that you're not interested in a Buy Ontario strategy, at least not one that's effective. Now that a recession is truly here and thousands more manufacturing jobs are truly at risk, would you reconsider the issue of an effective Buy Ontario strategy, or are those manufacturing jobs on their own as well, according to the McGuinty government?

Hon. George Smitherman: I would think that on the matter of the honourable member's encouragement of transportation projects, he might acknowledge that the first thing you need to do is support them in the first place. This is the honourable member who opposed the extension of the subway to York University and beyond, to York region, referring to York region's one million people as sparsely populated.

The Premier, on this point, has been very clear to say that as we move forward with the investments through the Ministry of Transportation, at least 82% of all those projects will enjoy domestic content. This is a strong recognition that as we invest in infrastructure, we invest in the opportunity in local communities to deliver these projects, and that certainly holds true for transportation-related projects.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: Once again, the McGuinty government misses the boat. In the United States, if there is one penny of government money in a purchase of streetcars, subway cars, buses, then 50% of the manufacturing of those transit vehicles has to be done in the United States. It sustains jobs. But the McGuinty government doesn't get it.

The other issue is this: We have proposed, over and over again, a refundable manufacturing investment tax credit. Just last week, the Minister of Finance said it wouldn't be a bad idea. What I want to know is this: When are we going to see a refundable manufacturing investment tax credit in Ontario to help sustain jobs, or is that another good idea that the McGuinty government isn't going to implement?

Hon. George Smitherman: Minister of Finance, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member is correct that that type of tax credit does have some benefit. I'll again remind the member what we decided to do. The reason we didn't do that in the last budget or in the last fall statement is the timing of the cash flow to the manufacturers—they still wouldn't have money, even if we did it in March. It's acknowledged through the Canada Revenue Agency and those—what we chose to do instead was eliminate retroactively the capital tax, which put money into the hands of manufacturers this past July. The choice we made by making that investment, which was more than \$300 million and yielded, by the way, more money than his idea would have, was to get money into the pockets of our manufacturers when they needed it.

While that idea has merit and was promoted by a number of people, we felt ours was the better plan under the circumstances.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: What the McGuinty government neglects to mention is that the people who got most of the money from the reduction in the capital tax are banks, insurance companies and oil companies—the very outfits that need it the least.

What the McGuinty government refuses to recognize is that provinces like Manitoba that saw the loss of manufacturing jobs coming implemented a refundable manufacturing investment tax credit five years ago so that companies and workers have been able to benefit from it over five years.

Once again, the McGuinty government continues to talk about what it did yesterday and misses the boat on what should have been done and still should be done. When are you going to provide the short-term loan financing so we don't lose more auto parts manufacturing jobs? When are you going to bring in a refundable manufacturing investment tax credit so, once again, we don't lose more manufacturing jobs? When are we going to see an effective Buy Ontario strategy so, once again, we don't—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Again, when one analyzes what the leader is proposing, it doesn't, first of all, acknowledge what we've already done. Number two, in terms of the manufacturers' credit, I explained to him—and I'll explain it again—that the vast majority of that money went directly to manufacturers at a time they needed the cash flow.

Sir, there are enormous challenges in the economy. We have been dealing with the automotive parts folks.

We need a federal partner on the automotive and automotive parts sector. One need look no further than Washington to see what is going on down south.

We will continue, as the Minister of Economic Development has said, to implement policies that are real, effective and help manufacturers today, not just talk about ideas that may or may not work. That has been the plan. It will continue to be the plan, and we will continue to work through these challenging times with all sectors in the Ontario economy.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Minister of Finance: Ontario families are still shocked that for the first time in history Ontario is receiving equalization payments and that your failed tax-and-spend policies have put Ontario on the equivalent of the welfare rolls of Confederation. What's even more shocking is there seems to be no shock on that side of the floor. There seems to be no regret. There has been no call to arms by you or the Premier to say that we're going to grow ourselves out of a have-not province. There has been no statement that come hell or high water will you allow Ontario to stay a have-not province.

Minister, when will you and the Premier call together all of your ministers to say, what are we going to do to turn this around to grow our province and to make sure we're not an equalization province anymore?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The seriousness of the challenges in the world economy today, particularly as they relate to the United States as our major trading partner, are enormously challenging. We have laid out a plan that we believe is the right plan. I don't agree with you that giving corporations tax cuts is going to cure this. In fact, Mr. Courchene, the Queen's economist, said today with respect to equalization, "The essential point is that if you have a sizable amount of energy royalties entering the equalization formula ... at a sufficiently high energy price, no formula is going to prevent Ontario from" achieving this.

These are enormously challenging times. They require full partnership with a federal government that has been absent—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: This is what is particularly shocking: that the minister just seems to pocket the equalization handouts, that we're now a have-not province, and then says, "We're going to stay the course." Minister, I don't think you appreciate this. For the first time in the history of this great country of Canada, our tremendously strong province is now receiving equalization payments from other provinces, handouts to the province of Ontario for the first time in history. Where's the regret? Where's the sorrow? Where is a plan to turn our province around? Where is the call to arms to say that we will not allow Ontario to remain a have-not province?

Minister, you increased taxes through the roof, you outspent in such a way it would make Bob Rae blush, and you've chased talented Ontarians out of this province. Where is a new plan? When are you going to turn things around? When will you pull Ontario out of have-not status?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We will be paying ourselves equalization this year. I guess the more important issue is, when will the opposition come to terms with the reality in the world economy? When will the opposition put aside the histrionics and the yelling related to an equation that basically recognizes who has oil and who doesn't? When will the opposition recognize what their leaders and they said when they were in government with respect to equalization?

Sir, the challenges in our economy go well beyond equalization. The amount of money we're paying ourselves has nothing to do with all of the great strengths that still exist in this economy. What we need is help with the automotive sector. What we need is a federal government that's fully engaged. We have laid out a plan that will get Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question?

CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. The minister has repeatedly said there was no change to temporary care assistance eligibility rules until last week when she admitted that there was a redefinition, making "temporary" mean "short-term," which changes the eligibility rules by any interpretation. In a response to the minister's recent letters to the editor, one grandmother, Bernadette, wrote, "The temporary care system has never been short-term." This grandmother has been receiving TCA for 12 years. She's in the gallery, along with Betty, who has been receiving it for 11 years, and Sandra, who has been receiving it for 10 years.

Will this minister commit to these grandmothers that she will reverse her definition of "temporary" and reinstate TCA to all grandchildren now?

1100

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: First of all, let me take a moment to personally thank the grandmothers who are here, all of those in Ontario who are taking care of their grandchildren and also all of those adults who are taking care of their children.

What the member is saying is not true. The definition has not been changed. It was always "temporary care assistance," so it's temporary. This short-term program is designed to provide stability for families while child custody status is determined. These situations are different in different families. We left a lot of flexibility to the administrator of the program because—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: If a caregiver is related to a child, such as these grandparents in the gallery today, their only

means of financial assistance is \$231 a month through the temporary care assistance program. However, if these grandmothers were not related to the children, they would qualify as foster parents and receive \$900 per month.

Taking the minister's lead, her own caucus believes that there are other programs for which the grandparents are eligible. Other than welfare, for which they don't qualify, and the Ontario child benefit, which gives them a whopping \$50 a month, can the minister enlighten her own caucus and this House on what Ontario programs are available to these grandparents who are in the gallery today?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Again, this program is a temporary program, and the grandparents or any adults taking care of a child have other programs that are available to them, like the Ontario child benefit, for instance, and the national child tax benefit. So all these benefits are available to adults or grandparents who are taking care of their children.

What the member is talking about is the program under the CAS, and with the program under the CAS, there's no decision by the minister who will qualify. It's a decision from the court. It's offered to the grandparents also, but it's a decision from the court, not from the minister. This temporary care assistance is temporary.

AMATEUR SPORT

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My question is to the Minister of Health Promotion. As a member from our nation's capital, it is of great concern to my constituents in Ottawa Centre when an athlete's career is impeded by lack of funding from governments. I'm referring to an Ottawa Citizen article from the summer about a badminton player by the name of Mike Beres, whose funding was terminated by the federal government. "He lost his federal funding of \$1,500 per month through Canada's athlete assistance program." According to the article, "coincidentally, 2007 was his best season in 13 years on the national team."

Minister, how is the McGuinty government supporting athletes like Mike Beres and the other individuals from my riding and across Ontario who need support from the community and all levels of government to achieve their full potential?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: Today I am privileged to rise in this House, particularly on this historical day, a day on which the first person of colour, Barack Obama, is poised to become President of the United States of America.

I want to thank the member from Ottawa for his question. Our government recognizes the sacrifices that Ontario athletes make. High-performance athletes are role models that inspire all Ontarians to live healthy, active lives. I'm happy to say that the athlete mentioned received funding in the amount of \$7,200 through our government's Quest for Gold program. In 2006, when we launched the program, it was the first time that high-

performance athletes received direct financial support from the provincial government in 20 years.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Minister. I'm glad to hear the individual from Ottawa did receive significant funding through the McGuinty government. I know this funding will play a very supportive role in Mike Beres' career and the careers of all recipients in the Quest for Gold program. But, Minister, again and again I hear from organizations in my riding about the lack of sport infrastructure in and across the province. I hear of stories about athletes training in other provinces because Ontario does not have the proper sport infrastructure.

I am also aware that Ontario is working hard to bring the Pan American Games to Ontario in 2015. Sadly, Ontario has not hosted a multi-sport international event since the Commonwealth Games in 1930 in Hamilton. That was 78 years ago.

Minister, what investments has the McGuinty government made in sport infrastructure and to what extent will the 2015 Pan Am Games assist in the building of sport infrastructure in Ontario?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I could not agree more with the member from Ottawa. Indeed, athletes do need outstanding facilities to train in. After many years of underfunding under the government opposite, we are making strides to establish training facilities.

Earlier this year, I made an important announcement about a partnership between our government and the University of Toronto. This \$2-million funding will provide high-performance athletes across the country with access to new, state-of-the-art facilities and sports medicine services at the University of Toronto's Varsity Centre. And, yes, we do know that we need more. That is why we have launched our bid for the 2015 Pan American Games. If we are successful in our quest for the games, we will have an increased opportunity for more sport infrastructure in this province. The games will leave a long-lasting legacy of sport—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, to the Minister of Finance. The McGuinty government has presided over the decline of Ontario's manufacturing sector for a number of years now to the point where it's in crisis. While the government can't control global events, the government can control its fiscal policies.

In February of this year, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce wrote to the minister with a warning and a very specific request. On behalf of 57,000 businesses from all sectors of the economy, the chamber asked the McGuinty government to implement a made-in-Ontario policy that would require the use of domestic-based suppliers for public expenditures on infrastructure projects.

Quebec implemented a policy that adopted a 60% Canadian-content threshold for provincially funded

transit projects. This government responded with a 25% content.

I would like to ask the minister this: Would the minister explain why Ontario manufacturers don't deserve the same—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. George Smitherman: I do want to thank the honourable member, and I agree that—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Member from Renfrew.

Hon. George Smitherman: —there are opportunities for us to look at the profile of government expenditures and to seek the best opportunities to influence, that they have the strongest impact in the economy of Ontario. In fact, in a meeting yesterday with Hydro One I had this very same conversation.

On the matter of transportation, which the member raised specifically, I do think it's important to note that when you combine all the costs for transportation, including engineering, site preparation and the acquisition of rail cars or one form of car or another, you're looking at more than 80% Ontario domestic content in those transportation projects. I think that's a very high standard, and we should seek across the breadth of other investments—look for opportunities to improve on that even further.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: Len Crispino, the president and CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, could not have said it more clearly, and I quote from his letter to the minister: "Hundreds of millions of dollars that should be creating jobs and economic benefits for domestic manufacturers and suppliers are instead exiting Canada (and Ontario) to create jobs and economic benefits in foreign countries." That is not because of global economic factors, it's because of the policy of this government. It has failed to do what other jurisdictions have done.

Quebec, as I said earlier, adopted a 60% Canadian content. All G7 nations plus China, where the Premier is today, have implemented policies that set mandatory domestic content. The United States imposes strict regulations for all local content.

I would ask the minister this: Why is the McGuinty government not willing to use its regulatory authority to level the playing field for Ontario's—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister?

Hon. George Smitherman: With frankness, the honourable member loses some sight of the fact that the province of Ontario is one of the most export-oriented jurisdictions in the world.

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He said "a level playing field" at the conclusion of his question, but it actually sounded more like, "Let's look for policies that tilt the playing field in a particular area." There are opportunities to do that. We should pursue those.

As I mentioned earlier to the honourable member, I gave a specific example where I've had that conversation of late. But we should keep in mind that an extraordinary amount of employment in the province of Ontario is for people in some of these very same sectors that are manufacturing products here in Ontario that are being distributed to other jurisdictions. We should seek to ensure that we move forward in a way that recognizes that we also depend upon ongoing access to foreign markets.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My question is to the Minister of Education.

Last month, at Metcalfe Central Public School, near Strathroy, 90% of parents kept their children home for one day to protest the closing of their school. Adelaide Metcalfe Mayor John Milligan says, "The ... committee was a process we went through that didn't mean a whole lot. It was supposed to be a community consultation but the results were determined beforehand and that never changed despite the recommendations that were made."

Closing and selling schools to sustain this government's broken funding formula is short-sighted. When will this minister and this government start respecting the wishes of parents and stop closing schools until the promised review of the funding formula in 2010?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the member opposite realizes, because he is very well informed on education issues, that in this province there are 90,000 fewer students in our system now than there were in 2003. I know he knows that fact.

I know he also knows that school boards at the local level need to be able to make decisions that are in the best interests of their whole boards. They need to look at the whole student body. They need to be able to deliver programs according to the students' needs, and that sometimes does mean they have to go through a process, and schools do close.

We have put guidelines in place. School boards are in the process, and have always been in the process, of consulting with their communities since we have been in office to make the determinations that are in the best interests of program delivery for their students.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: If the minister isn't going to listen to parents on the accommodation and review committees, there is no point in having them.

Parents at Norwich District High School, école Madeleine-de-Roybon in Kingston, parents from Brantwood, Linbrook, Chisholm and New Central schools in Oakville know that accommodation review committees are a sham. School boards are doing the government's dirty work, selling schools to make up for inadequate funding.

You can't blame declining enrolment for your lack of foresight. Why won't the minister declare a moratorium on school closures until her own working group on declining enrolment has issued a report?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I look forward to the recommendations of the declining enrolment work group.

We have done a number of things since we've been in office to protect school boards against having to close schools. So we've put into the funding formula a school foundation grant that moved a billion dollars out of the per pupil amount into a school foundation amount that guarantees a principal and a secretary for every school.

The reality is that we did freeze school closures, put a moratorium on school closures, for two years. Boards said to us, "We need to get on with the business of rationalizing our systems." Because of declining enrolment, they needed to be able to deliver programs, so we've put the guidelines in place.

I know the member opposite understands that it would be irresponsible of us to tie the hands of local school boards. The consultations that happen do influence the decisions of boards, and it's also true that when a school has to close or schools are consolidated—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: My question is for the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. Minister, you have been clear that as part of the IPSP, the government is planning to keep the nuclear capacity in Ontario at approximately 14,000 megawatts. This capacity includes the two new units that are in planning to be built at Darlington, in Durham region.

You'll know that citizens in my riding and neighbouring communities are supportive of a new nuclear facility at Darlington. The existing facility has provided many Ontarians with highly skilled and good-paying jobs. The new nuclear units that are in planning to be built will also help provide more jobs in the community, a welcome move after some troubling news that we have received lately. Can you tell me whether you are still planning to announce the winning bidder by March 2009?

Hon. George Smitherman: I do want to thank the honourable member and note the support of the good people in Durham region with respect to being good, strong, willing hosts for nuclear power.

No. At present, we anticipate that at March 31, 2009, we'll be reviewing the proposals that have come in from the various proponents and moving towards announcement of a preferred vendor later in the spring. We're giving the proponents a short extension beyond December 31, recognizing the volatility of the times and also that we have asked them for some additional information.

This large project is complex, it's very important to Ontario's long-term economic interests, and we're offering just a little bit more time because we've asked for additional information—recognizing the circumstances—and driving forward to achieve a result that is the very best result for all of the ratepayers in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Minister, you are correct. This certainly is a very complex and important infrastructure project for Ontario, and I understand the need to get it right, especially given the continued volatility in the global markets. I'm sure my constituents will be pleased to hear that you're still as determined as ever to make sure this plan is a success.

Bruce Power has also made an announcement about going forward with an environmental assessment, with plans to build a new facility at Nanticoke. What does this mean for your plans to keep nuclear at or around the same level that it is today, and what does it mean for the future of the coal facility at Nanticoke?

Hon. George Smitherman: Firstly, we must recognize that Bruce Power is an inordinately powerful, important and good, strong player in the Ontario energy sector. We note, of course, that they've taken an interest in trying to expand the horizons of nuclear opportunities to other parts of the province.

Our plans remain very, very firm: 14,000 megawatts of installed nuclear, representing just about half of all the power that we use in the province in any given year. Nanticoke is not part of those plans, but a company can take on these initiatives on their own resolve.

With respect to the coal plant at Nanticoke, we're not going to be using coal in the province of Ontario beyond 2014, but I've been working very closely with Ontario Power Generation to encourage all prospects and working, as well, with the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Natural Resources to see what opportunities there are for biomass, for waste agricultural or forestry products that might allow some of the investment in these existing coal-fired plants to be—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Robert Bailey: My question is to the Minister of Labour. Minister, Bill 119, your bill that would impose punishing new taxes on small business—in fact \$11,000 estimates by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business—was introduced one week ago today. This morning, the deputy government House leader effectively shut down debate on second reading of this bill, even though more opposition members wanted to speak to it. Why are you afraid of a debate on this bill, Minister? Why will you not allow a full debate on this bill?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: The McGuinty government is making historic investments in infrastructure, investments in our schools, in hospitals, in roads, in making sure that we have strongly built communities.

Now, who does that work? Our hard-working construction workers, and we want to make sure that their health and safety are taken into account, that we protect them. Now, that member may feel that he doesn't want those protections in place, that we shouldn't have benefits for those construction workers. We feel differently. We feel that the construction industry is a high-risk

industry. Many people do get injured every year in construction. We want to make sure that if they do get injured, they're protected, they have benefits—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke will withdraw the comment.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Seeing as the minister doesn't want to hear any more opposition to second reading, I assume he is going to severely limit the ability of small business owners to voice their opposition to this bill at the committee stage.

Minister, what are your specific plans for the coming time allocation motion? Will you allow this bill to go to committee, travel the province to hear from the people who will be affected by this bill, or will you continue to silence the Ontarians who are afraid of this punishing new tax on small business?

1120

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Our number one priority is the health and safety of Ontario workers and our construction workers. A principle that we also live by is fairness, and what this proposed legislation will do is to even the playing field. I want to tell the member again, from his neck of the woods, Sarnia, here is what Doug Chalmers had to say: "Congratulations. Absolutely brilliant. This will make Ontario a safer workplace and improve the quality of life for all of us." We're working with all businesses. Doug Chalmers gets it. I hope that the member would understand the importance of this legislation.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The latest information we have shows that only 12% of housing units built through the affordable housing program rent for \$500 a month or less. That means that affordable housing isn't actually affordable for those living on minimum wage, Ontario Works or ODSP.

Can the minister tell this House exactly how many of his so-called affordable housing units rent for \$500 a month or less?

Hon. Jim Watson: I am particularly pleased with the work that we've done in implementing the affordable housing program agreement that we signed with the previous federal government: 6,301 units have been built; 2,063 are under construction; 3,650 are awaiting planning approval at the municipal level; and 8,737 are with local service managers in the preplanning stage. We've also got enormous take-up on the ROOF program, rental opportunities for Ontario families, which provides \$1,200 in rent supplements. To date, with other rent supplement programs, over 35,000 residents of Ontario are receiving rent supplements thanks to the McGuinty government.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I didn't actually hear an answer to the question. The question was, how many of those units rent for \$500 or less? The minister is quick to list off numbers, but the question is whether low-income Ontarians can actually afford his so-called affordable housing. Most of the units under the affordable housing program cost more—way more—than \$700 per month. That's over half of a minimum-wage earner's income. It's more than somebody on OW actually makes in a month.

Rather than just spouting off numbers from his briefing book, why won't the minister admit that his affordable housing program isn't actually affordable?

Hon. Jim Watson: Once again, the NDP are on the wrong side of this issue. Let's look at one of the most important aspects of renting in this province, and that is the annual rental increase allowed by the province of Ontario. When the New Democrats were in power, their average increase under their last three years was 4.82%. Under the McGuinty government, it is 2.05%. Secondly, when we brought forward a very progressive, balanced residential tenancies agreement, who voted against it? Who turned their backs on tenants? The New Democrats did. Finally, the rent bank has helped 15,500 individuals so far. When we brought the rent bank program forward, who voted against the rent bank helping some of the most vulnerable people in our community? The New Democrats. Shame on you—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. Bill Mauro: My question is to the Minister of Labour. Minister, of late, there have been some members of this Legislature suggesting ministry inspectors are being overzealous in their inspections and enforcement of the Occupational Health and Safety Act. Our government has been accused of bringing forward an undue regulatory burden through our inspections of these workplaces. Every day, about 715 workers are injured in this province; that's one every two minutes. In 2007, 100 workers lost their lives in our province. Minister, can you tell us about the real cost to businesses when a worker is injured or dies?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I want to thank the member for Thunder Bay—Atikokan for his interest and advocacy for the hard-working people of his riding. There is no greater priority for our government than the health and safety of our Ontario workers. Yes, members from across the floor spoke yesterday about the cost to business of the Ministry of Labour inspectors performing their jobs to ensure the health and safety of our workers. We support those inspectors. Unfortunately, across the aisle, that previous government cut inspectors. We don't believe that's the way to go.

Let me turn this around. When we talk about the cost to businesses who don't pay attention to the health and safety of their workers, for every lost-time injury, on average, the incident costs a business \$98,000. That's bottom line. We want to make sure that we can stop that human suffering of those—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the minister for that information and commend the ministry for the work they are doing to ensure that Ontario workers are safe at work.

There are many other business advantages as well. Organizations that can recruit and retain the best people have a competitive advantage. Research shows a link between satisfied employees and satisfied customers. The healthy workplace can also create shareholder value as investors scrutinize how organizations fulfill their responsibility to society. Bluntly put, a good health and safety record leads to a good business record.

Minister, can you please tell us what the ministry is doing to build a strong health and safety culture throughout Ontario's workplaces?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: The member is quite right. It makes good business sense to invest in health and safety. This past June, we launched our new strategic plan for health and safety in the workplace. It's called Safe at Work Ontario. It's a broader approach to safety inspections that affords our inspectors flexibility, and they can strategically go in and target businesses where there is high risk, where their history of compliance to health and safety regulations has not been a good one.

But we've also taken a proactive approach. We want to work with those businesses to make them healthier and safer places. That's why over the last four years, we hired an additional 200 health and safety inspectors to go out there into the field, work with businesses, make sure that we have a strong and prosperous Ontario and make sure that all those businesses—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: My question is for the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Treasure Island Daycare Centre has operated out of the OPP general headquarters since the building was opened to support the 1,200 employees who were relocated to Orillia. Today it serves over 120 clients, with another 100 families on a waiting list. Recently they were notified that they would have to vacate the premises by January 31 due to a provincial security review. The day care is having a very difficult time finding affordable space in a completely unrealistic time frame. If forced to close, there will be a child care crisis in the city of Orillia area, making it difficult for families to go to work.

As minister for the lead ministry occupying the general headquarters, having provided the original capital funding for the day care service, what resources do you intend to provide to assist with the forced relocation?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: To the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am aware that the ORC will not be renewing the lease for this child care centre. Obviously there are security issues, and I can't comment

on that, but in the supplementary I may refer it to my colleague.

We have been in continuous contact with the child care centre and the county of Simcoe. We are working with them to develop a relocation plan for these kids. We absolutely value children having a place to go, a safe place to go, but the safety of the children is paramount for us. We will, I can assure you, continue to work with the child care centre and with the county of Simcoe every way we possibly can.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Well, I've talked to the administrator and it's not working very quickly. I can tell you that right now.

Minister, are you aware of the Management Board Secretariat's directive 1-12, mandating the development of child care services by ministries and agencies of the Ontario government? It was under this directive that the child care centre was built to support employment in the Ontario public service sector at the OPP general headquarters. Due to this directive's standing today, do you not agree that your ministry has a moral and legal obligation to provide the funding and realistic time frames for the Treasure Island Daycare to relocate? Is this not just another example of this government making it harder for people to go to work by removing access to day care?
1130

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure Renewal.

Hon. George Smitherman: I just do want to say very sincerely to the honourable member that the threat assessment was not something that we brought up; it was the experts that are in the building. You know these folks well and you respect them very much. I think the question goes a little bit down a path that isn't fully appropriate.

The Ontario Realty Corp., which I have some responsibility for, has offered to be of assistance to the daycare. To the best of my knowledge, they've said no, that they weren't interested in that. Instead, they've used a real estate agent. But I'm very happy to work with the honourable member and to circle back and try and make sure that the necessary skills and resources are brought to the fore so that the daycare can continue to be an important presence in the community of Orillia, albeit in a setting that experts don't deem to be a security threat.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Mr. Minister, after years of paying modest property taxes in a much larger building, the Sisters of St. Joseph of London have been hit with a property tax assessment on a much smaller and energy-efficient building that could result in a tax bill as high as \$400,000 a year. The move triggered a reassessment based on existing law that says that places of public worship are exempt from property tax, but where a religious order prays and lives a life of religious devotion is not.

Minister, I can't believe that that was the intent of the law, and it simply makes no sense.

Will this government change the law so that properties where religious orders practise their religious life are treated the same for property tax purposes as they were in the past?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I had the benefit of being educated by the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Sisters of the Holy Names, and I appreciate your raising the issue with me. I haven't had a chance to consider it. You've raised a number of good points in the past. I undertake to look into it and hopefully work with you to address the situation.

Mr. Michael Prue: We bring these to the attention of the Minister of Finance. This is the second time I have done so. It seems to me that there are a number of problems within the bill itself, and I welcome the fact that you will be looking at this, because I do believe that it is wrong, what is happening here, where a religious order moves into a new building, tries to make it energy-efficient and then gets whacked with a huge potential tax increase.

I wonder if the minister would commit himself to doing a thorough review of the legislation related to impact, because this is two that I have now brought forward. There might be potentially others, and I think we need to have a good, solid look at all of them.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Again, I applaud the member for his good work on other files and I look forward to working on this. I'm reminded by Minister Matthews that we had a chance to meet with the Sisters of St. Joseph in London last week at our pre-budget consultation. They offered us wonderful insight on the poverty agenda. We didn't talk about this specific issue, but again, the member raises a very good point. I appreciate that and I look forward to talking to him more about this. Hopefully all of us in the Legislature can work together to help these wonderful members of the order right across Ontario.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: My question is to the Minister of Research and Innovation. As part of our five-point plan for the economy, I certainly support the role that the Ministry of Research and Innovation is playing in fostering Ontario's most creative thinkers.

Incredible innovations are being developed in rural Ontario. For example, VanEngelen Dairy Farms and Hog Tied Farms of Thedford in my riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex installed Ontario's first on-farm 250-kilowatt windmill to supply power for the dairy and hog operation as well as to supply the grid in our community.

Often my constituents hear announcements being made in urban Ontario. While no one can deny the research strength and economic challenges in urban areas, we certainly know that as our economy slows, rural Ontario has faced similar problems. So I would ask the minister: Is the ministry making sure that rural innovations are given the same opportunity as those in urban areas—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank my friend and neighbour, the member, for the question. The world is struggling with the concept of how we become sustainable, and I can assure the member that the solutions to that will come, indeed, from rural Ontario.

I would highlight for the members the investment that we just made recently in your riding, at the University of Western Ontario at their experimental farm just north of London, in the Institute for Chemicals and Fuels for Alternative Resources, an institute called ICFAR—an investment of some \$7.5 million, doing two things, but particularly in your riding at a very large dairy operation, Stanton Farms where we've invested, of the \$7.5 million, some \$2.5 million in advanced research in regard to the use of anaerobic digestion, which is a source of renewable power. It allows us to have fertilizer that is pathogen-free, and that and the other investments that we're making—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

VISITORS

Hon. John Milloy: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I wanted to let members know that the Ontario competitors in the World Skills Competition I introduced earlier have arrived, and I know they will want to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. We do welcome the guests, and we're very proud of the guests, but I'd remind the minister that that was not a point of order. If there are issues regarding introductions of guests, take it up with the House leaders, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Order.

DEFERRED VOTES

BUDGET MEASURES AND INTERIM APPROPRIATION ACT, 2008 (NO. 2)

LOI DE 2008 SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES ET L'AFFECTATION ANTICIPÉE DE CRÉDITS (NO 2)

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We have a deferred vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 114. Call in the members. This is a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1136 to 1141.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Bentley moved second reading of Bill 114. All those in favour please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia
Albanese, Laura
Arthurs, Wayne

Duguid, Brad
Duncan, Dwight
Flynn, Kevin Daniel

Oraziotti, David
Pendergast, Leanna
Phillips, Gerry

Balkissoon, Bas
Bartolucci, Rick
Bentley, Christopher
Best, Margaret
Bradley, James J.
Brotan, Laurel C.
Brown, Michael A.
Bryant, Michael
Cansfield, Donna H.
Caplan, David
Carroll, Aileen
Craitor, Kim
Crozier, Bruce
Delaney, Bob
Dickson, Joe
Dombrowsky, Leona

Fonseca, Peter
Gerretsen, John
Gravelle, Michael
Hoy, Pat
Jaczek, Helena
Kwintar, Monte
Leal, Jeff
Levac, Dave
Mangat, Amrit
Matthews, Deborah
Mauro, Bill
McMeekin, Ted
Meilleur, Madeleine
Milloy, John
Mitchell, Carol
Naqvi, Yasir

Pupatello, Sandra
Qaadri, Shafiq
Ramal, Khalil
Ramsay, David
Rinaldi, Lou
Sandals, Liz
Sergio, Mario
Smith, Monique
Sousa, Charles
Takhari, Harinder S.
Van Bommel, Maria
Watson, Jim
Wilkinson, John
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed?

Nays

Arnott, Ted
Bailey, Robert
Barrett, Toby
Chudleigh, Ted
DiNovo, Cheri
Dunlop, Garfield
Elliott, Christine
Gélinas, France
Hampton, Howard
Hardeman, Ernie

Hillier, Randy
Horwath, Andrea
Hudak, Tim
Jones, Sylvia
Klees, Frank
Kormos, Peter
MacLeod, Lisa
Marchese, Rosario
Martiniuk, Gerry
Miller, Norm

Miller, Paul
Munro, Julia
O'Toole, John
Prue, Michael
Runciman, Robert W.
Savoline, Joyce
Scott, Laurie
Sterling, Norman W.
Wilson, Jim
Yakubski, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 56; the nays are 30.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to the order of the House dated November 3, the bill is ordered referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: This morning in the debate, there was some discussion about the timing of the debate stopping on Bill 119. There are a lot of members of the opposition still wishing to speak to that. I would like to ask for unanimous consent to continue debate on Bill 119.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): That was not a point of order. The member seeks unanimous consent to continue debate. I heard a no.

There being no further business, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1145 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I want to welcome the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers to Queen's Park today. With us in the gallery we have Edwina McGroddy, executive director of the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers Centre of Engineering Excellence, and Gina van den Burg, manager of public policy and recruitment.

I also want to remind all members of this Legislature to drop by the legislative dining room this evening to

meet and mingle with the engineers and listen to my wise, sage remarks.

Mr. Paul Miller: It's my pleasure to draw members' attention to the west members' gallery and the west public gallery. We have grandparents from several locations all over Ontario here today.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We have with us today in the Speaker's gallery, as part of the Remembrance Day tribute later this afternoon, friends and family of Charley Fox: Sue Beckett, his daughter; Cheryl Fox, his daughter-in-law; Todd Fox; Ryan Beckett; Andrew Wallace; Fred Banwell; David Nudds; Gerry Nudds; Americ Sordi; Alan Meredith; Chuck Hill; Don Harris; and Ted Barris. Welcome all to Queen's Park today.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SPORTS HALL OF FAME

Mr. John O'Toole: It's an honour to rise today and recognize outstanding citizens of the riding of Durham who have joined their local Sports Hall of Fame, marking their contribution to our community.

Joining the wall of fame in Scugog township were Bill Davidson, champion motorcycle sidecar racer; John McClelland, honoured for coverage of local sports for many years in community newspapers; David Porter, Olympian and ice dance champion, with his partner, Barbara Berezowski; Jim Zoet, Olympic team member and college basketball star; and the 1965 Port Perry Squirts, all-Ontario softball champions.

Joining the Clarington Sports Hall of Fame are Garry Bachman, who 86 years old and recently won five gold medals at the 2007 world masters track and field championships; Jack Brough, a 91-year-old who is a six-time winner of the Ontario men's double badminton championship with his partner, the late Al Osborne; Lori Glazier, the Olympic snowboarder; Sommer West, a member of the Canadian Olympic women's softball team at the 2000 Olympics and also a star hockey player—I believe she played in the Olympics as well; and also members of Splash aquatics facility, who are outstanding contributors to staying fit in Ontario.

EVENTS IN MARKHAM

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I recently attended an event at the Markham Museum, hosted by the Markham Lions Club, to celebrate its receipt of an award from the Ontario Trillium Foundation in the amount of \$71,700. A researcher and a videographer will be hired to create a permanent exhibit, promoting volunteerism and showcasing the Markham Lions Club's 65-year history and myriad achievements.

The Markham Lions Club has been central to our community. Club activities include canvassing for the Salvation Army, performing vision screening at schools,

transporting donated eyes from hospitals to the University of Toronto eye bank, fundraising for other associations, and volunteering at charity barbecues and the Markham Fair. The club also provides volunteer work opportunities for high school students, runs programs at Markham schools and participates in the annual Markham Santa Claus parade.

One aspect of our Lions Club that makes me particularly proud is that the immediate past president, Grace Nedland, is the first woman to serve in that capacity.

The exhibit will be located at the Markham Museum in my riding of Oak Ridges–Markham. Last year, it welcomed 50,000 visitors.

I want to thank the government of Ontario and the Ontario Trillium Foundation for recognizing the efforts of the Markham Lions Club and the Markham Museum.

SKILLS TRAINING

Mr. Jim Wilson: I rise again today in recognition of College Week and Skilled Trades Awareness Week.

As a follow-up to my statement yesterday, I first want to thank Patricia Lang, the president of Confederation College, who was obviously the only president listening yesterday, because she sent me an e-mail to thank me for my remarks. So thank you, Pat.

Colleges across Ontario have planned several activities throughout this week and next to bring recognition to the opportunities available in the skilled trades. This week, high school students will be touring colleges to learn about career opportunities in the skilled trades. With the retirement of baby boomers and the shortage of skilled-trade workers, it's critical that students and parents be aware of these opportunities.

Today, Colleges Ontario, Skills Canada–Ontario, Connect and OCAS will be hosting a reception at Sutton Place; it started about five minutes ago, at 3 o'clock. It was to be, members may note, in the committee rooms here, 228 etc., but it's been moved to the 33rd floor of Sutton Place. The reception is between 3 and 5. All are welcome, including your staffs. We certainly encourage you all to come and to congratulate the skilled competition competitors. These are seven students who have demonstrated outstanding skills during their time at college, and they will be congratulated during the reception.

I also want to let the good people of Simcoe–Grey know that Georgian College is having its open house on November 15 in Barrie. Parents and students can come and meet the faculty and thank the president at the president's tea at 11 a.m.

FUNDRAISING

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Across our ridings all over Ontario, it's the time of year when groups are out there trying to fundraise much-needed dollars in order to keep their organizations afloat. We have them in our communities: the francophone club, the Polish club, the Italian

club, hockey, sports leagues and others who are working hard in order to have the money they need in order to keep a roof over their heads and provide the services that they do within the community.

But we all know that it's getting tougher and tougher for them to raise money, not only because there's less money out there, but because some of the rules that have been established both by this Legislature and the gaming commission have really restricted their ability to raise the kinds of monies they have to.

I'll give you an example. The police association in our community has a fundraiser—they've been doing it for at least 30 years—a lobster day, when people can come and buy lobster for a ticket of \$100. All of that money goes back to charitable organizations in our community. After all, these are the cops who are running it, so it's got to be pretty legit. But they can't get a licence. Why? This government has said, "You can't do it because you're not allowed to play cards at these particular events."

I would just say that people have been doing these types of activities for years. The government is hoarding millions and millions of dollars on a daily basis by way of their casinos and other gaming activities, but they certainly don't want to allow local community organizations to do charitable events that would let them do that. I say that this is something that needs to be changed, and I think this government should be shamed into doing it, because they're restricting those clubs.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Mr. Kuldip Kular: It gives me great pleasure to rise today to acknowledge the McGuinty government's many initiatives to recognize foreign credentials and retain skilled workers.

This government recognizes that we must promote and retain the talents and skills of newcomers who arrive in Ontario every day. We also recognize that in the global economy, when our newcomers succeed, Ontario succeeds, and have forged partnerships and initiated bold investments to provide newcomers with the tools they need to succeed.

Some of the highlights include:

- signing the first-ever Canada-Ontario immigration agreement with the federal government. This agreement will quadruple federal spending on language training and settlement services over five years;

- the passage of Bill 124, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, that breaks down barriers and helps newcomers find work sooner and in their own field of expertise;

- investing \$50 million annually in occupation-specific language training: English as a second language, French as a second language, and citizenship and language training; and

- investing \$85 million in 145 bridge training programs that will help more than 2,300 newcomers learn the language of their field, land jobs and excel in their workplace.

These investments show the McGuinty government's commitment to reducing barriers to credit—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

1510

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Toby Barrett: It's sad to hear of Canada's new world order, where Ontario is now a have-not province while Alberta, Saskatchewan, BC and even Newfoundland now carry the province and offer Premier McGuinty a hand up. Here in Ontario, we're now one of Canada's welfare cases.

Dalton McGuinty has announced a made-in-Ontario deficit of half a billion dollars, and he previously hit us with the largest tax hike in the province of Ontario. This government spent like drunken sailors in the good times and failed to save for a rainy day. They didn't bat an eyelash when the federal government reduced equalization payments nationwide by \$2 billion. Your lack of planning and inaction have cost us \$1 billion.

How could you be blindsided? We saw the train wreck approaching. We warned you.

As media reports indicate, Canada is now divided into three classes: provinces that make things happen, those that watch what happens, and those that sit back and wonder what the hell just happened. Ontario fits into the latter.

This Premier now has the dubious distinction of being the first Premier to steer Ontario into have-not status. When will you accept responsibility? Will you not show any regret, any remorse, for this have-not status?

Leadership is all about having a plan. What is your government's plan to get our economy off its knees?

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I rise in the House today on a positive note to speak to the latest initiative in the McGuinty government's ongoing commitment to improving driver safety across Ontario.

Our government has made significant progress in improving road safety through things like repairing aging infrastructure, enacting tough street racing legislation, and establishing aerial enforcement of 400-series highways.

Our government also recognizes, however, that a leading cause of collisions is distracted driving, so I'm pleased with this government's bill that bans the use of electronic devices while driving. We will now join the provinces of Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, and Nova Scotia. We recognize that inattentive drivers are something we need to do something about, and attentive drivers are the first step in reducing traffic accidents and fatalities.

Our legislation also recognizes the multitude of electronic devices that are currently on the market and will extend the ban to include all electronic devices. That includes BlackBerrys, PDAs, and hand-held GPSs. This

makes this legislation truly groundbreaking. These devices can be utilized once the driver is parked, pulled to the side of the road, or by passengers in the vehicle.

This legislation is yet another example of the bold moves taken by the McGuinty government to increase driver safety on our roads. We'll continue to work hard so that people arrive home safely to their loved ones every time they leave their house in their automobile.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: The safe schools strategy has been in my portfolio for over 20 years, both as a high school teacher and as a high school administrator in my riding of Kitchener-Conestoga and in the greater Waterloo region.

I'm proud to say that this government understands that a safe learning environment is essential to academic success. Students have a right to feel safe and to be safe in their schools. This government has invested \$135 million through our safe schools strategy to ensure that there are serious consequences for violence while focusing on preventing violent acts before they occur. Some highlights of this strategy include: amending the Education Act to include bullying as an infraction for which there are consequences; putting more adults in schools by hiring 170 psychologists, social workers, youth workers and attendance counsellors to work with at-risk students; and training front-line staff, by providing bullying-prevention training to 25,000 teachers and almost 7,500 principals and vice-principals to ensure an effective response.

I continue to work as a member of the safe schools action team, along with my colleague Liz Sandals, who chairs the team, to continue to bring forward recommendations to keep our schools safe and secure.

The government is dedicated to providing a safe learning environment for all Ontario students. We will continue to work with teachers and school board staff to prevent violence and increase safety.

CITY OF OTTAWA

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: It's with great pleasure that I rise in the House today to share with my colleagues and all Ontarians how the McGuinty government is partnering with the city of Ottawa to build a stronger national capital region. The nation's capital has benefited from a strong relationship with the McGuinty government that stands in stark contrast to the confrontation and down-loading of the previous government.

I hear on a weekly basis from my constituents in Ottawa Centre about how important it is to work in partnership to address the lingering effects of the early 1990s. Since the residents of Ottawa Centre entrusted me as their representative, we have worked diligently to bring to Ottawa much-needed financial investments. This year alone, Ottawa has benefited from \$8.2 million to repair social housing units; \$14.6 million for roads and

bridges; \$20 million from the municipal infrastructure investment initiative for the central archives and the Ottawa library technical services facility; and \$77.3 million from the Investing in Ontario Act for municipal infrastructure projects.

Yesterday we heard from the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, who pointed out that as a result of the consensus report released last Friday, the people of Ottawa, by the time the plan is fully implemented, will save \$122 million per year. With these investments and the \$200 million that are still on the table for Ottawa's transit plan, our government will continue to partner with Ottawa to improve public services in the years to come.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I beg leave to present a report on the review of the Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004, from the Standing Committee on Social Policy and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Qaadri presents the committee's report and moves the adoption of its recommendations. Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: No, Speaker. I'll move adjournment of the debate, but will send it to you by way of page Shaukat, my nephew.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Qaadri moves the adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Debate adjourned.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT AMENDMENT ACT, 2008 LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES ÉVALUATIONS ENVIRONNEMENTALES

Mr. Balkissoon moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 123, An Act to amend the Environmental Assessment Act / Projet de loi 123, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les évaluations environnementales.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: The bill provides that certain municipal proponents may only apply for an approval of

an environmental assessment if the environmental assessment relates only to lands wholly situated within the territory of the municipal proponent. Joint applications by more than one municipal proponent are permitted where the environmental assessment relates to lands within the boundaries of the joint applicants.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

CRIME PREVENTION WEEK

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I rise in the House today to remind all honourable members that this week is Crime Prevention Week in Ontario. This week, we celebrate the partnership between law enforcement and the people of Ontario in helping to keep our communities and neighbourhoods safe. The theme of this week's event is Invest in Your Future: Prevent Crime. While the emphasis this year is on youth crime prevention, I hope the message will resonate with all Ontarians.

The McGuinty government continues to play an active role in preventing crime and keeping Ontario's neighbourhoods safe. We continue to put more police officers on the street, including the single largest increase in OPP officer strength in well over a decade. Our government permanently funds 2,000 police officers under our Safer Communities—1,000 Officers partnership and the community policing partnership program, so that municipal and First Nations police services can strengthen their front line, secure that these officers are permanently funded.

Last month, we announced an agreement with the federal government to administer a \$156-million fund that will put up to 329 additional OPP, municipal and First Nations police officers on the streets. The money is welcome, but this funding falls considerably short of the federal government's original commitment of at least 1,000 new police officers. Also, these funds are not permanent and will expire in only five years.

1520

For over a year, I and the McGuinty government have been urging the federal Minister of Public Safety to address this important matter, and we will continue to do so with the new federal minister, Peter Van Loan.

In addition to partnering with our communities to add police officers, our government is also investing in our community-based initiatives. Since 2003, we have invested more than \$2.1 million in local community-based crime prevention programs through our safer and vital communities grant fund. This year, we doubled provincial funding for the successful Reduce Impaired Driving Everywhere, or RIDE, program to \$2.4 million in 2008-09.

No one group holds a monopoly on crime prevention—not the government, not law enforcement, not the courts or probation and parole officers. We are all partners in crime prevention, and this is what Crime

Prevention Week is all about. Ontario businesses, school boards, community groups, police, and probation and parole officers are working together to protect our neighbours, prevent at-risk Ontarians from becoming first-time offenders, and stop first-time offenders from becoming repeat offenders.

This week, I encourage all honourable members to take part in Crime Prevention Week activities and to send a clear message that in Ontario we stand united in our fight against crime.

ADOPTION AWARENESS MONTH

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm honoured to rise in the House today to mark the launch of national Adoption Awareness Month. At the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, we are working to help—

Interruption.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. We very much welcome guests coming to the chamber. We encourage you to watch and listen to the proceedings. But, unfortunately, the rules that I preside over do not allow you to participate in proceedings.

Mr. Peter Kormos: It was laughter. That's a reflex action.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thank the honourable member from Welland for his armchair-Speaker advice, but I will not take his advice, and I remind everyone of the rules of the House. Minister?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: At the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, we're working to help every child in Ontario succeed. We all know that the love of a family in a home is the foundation of that success.

I want to take a moment to thank the thousands of generous men and women, brothers and sisters who have opened their hearts and their homes through adoption to children who needed a family. They are our neighbours, our child's teacher, the people we run into at the supermarket on any ordinary day. But make no mistake: There's nothing ordinary about the place they hold in the heart of their adopted and chosen child, or the difference they make in that child's life.

We must also take time this month to remember the hundreds of children in Ontario who are still waiting for an adoptive family of their own. These are children who are currently in the care of Ontario's children's aid societies. Some of them are older kids or siblings who want to stay together in an adoptive family, and some are children with special needs.

We're guided by the principle that children don't suddenly stop needing the love and guidance of their family when they leave care. That's why—

Interruption.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just remind the guests—and I'm speaking specifically now to the guests who are joining us in the west gallery—that hand motions and head motions are the same as participating in here. I know it may be challenging at times, but I do just ask that you listen and not express your views either visually or with your hands.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you, Speaker.

As I was saying, we are guided by the principle that children don't suddenly stop needing the love and guidance of their family when they leave care. That's why finding permanent homes for children in care is so important, not just for their today but for their tomorrow, for our tomorrow. These kids have so much to offer the right family, and the benefits and blessings are not the child's alone; they are absolutely that for the family too.

I've had the honour of meeting numerous families who have adopted children with special needs. Let me tell you that the love these adoptive families have for these precious children would inspire any of us in this House.

In 2006, our government made changes to the Child and Family Services Act to help more of these children settle into permanent homes more quickly. We brought in more openness so that a child can be adopted without severing ties to their birth family. We brought in reforms to make it easier for relatives to provide permanent homes for children.

On average, more than 800 children are adopted through Ontario's children's aid societies every year. Think about that for a moment. That's more than two children every day who find a permanent, loving home. There are two kids in Ontario who, today, are starting a new life, who now have a permanent bedroom of their own and a permanent place at the kitchen table. Our changes are working. Fewer kids are coming into care, and more are finding loving, permanent homes.

At the same time, just as there are children waiting for families, we know there are families waiting for children. Roughly one in 10 Ontarians is riding the emotional rollercoaster of infertility. In July 2008, I was pleased to announce an expert panel on infertility and adoption to help find solutions for people who are trying to start or expand a family. Led by Dr. David Johnston, this panel of experts will report back next year on ways to facilitate timely adoption so that more children who cannot remain with their birth parents can become part of families more quickly.

We're pleased to work with partners like the Adoption Council of Ontario, whose executive director, Pat Convery, said, "The adoption community will welcome recommendations that will help to address barriers to timely placement of children in families who are able to care for them."

In conclusion, as Ontarians, when we think of our larger collective family, we must include the children who are in the care of our children's aid societies. During national Adoption Awareness Month, I'm asking all Ontarians to take a moment to think about whether they can find room in their hearts for a child who, today, has no home to call his or her own.

TAKE OUR KIDS TO WORK DAY

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I'm pleased to address the Legislature about tomorrow's Take Our Kids to Work Day. Thousands of grade 9 students across Ontario and across

Canada will learn what it means to go to work. Let's make sure that they also learn what it means to be safe at work.

It's up to us as employers, parents, teachers and legislators to teach our youth about health and safety on the job. In my ministry, health and safety in the workplace is one of the first things we talk about when we host students for Take Our Kids to Work Day. I encourage all employers to do the same. Students visiting workplaces tomorrow, and indeed all young workers, should receive a comprehensive health and safety orientation when they first enter the workplace.

We have to encourage our young workers to ask questions when they start a new job. There is no such thing as a stupid question when it comes to workplace safety. Our young people need to know that it's their right to say no to unsafe work.

Young worker health and safety is a priority for this government. We're keeping our young workers safe in a number of ways. We're teaching our youth about health and safety in the workplace before they get a job. We've made it mandatory in the curriculum for all grades. Teachers now use the Ministry of Labour's Live Safe! Work Smart! resources to help students approach work with a safety-first attitude.

We have a website, WorkSmart Ontario, that makes information on occupational health and safety and employment standards more accessible to youth and their parents. Our ministry website also has a portal designed especially for young workers. This tells them about health and safety, as well as their employment rights. The Workplace Safety and Insurance Board has Web resources for young workers, as well. Every year, they run a video contest for high school students on workplace health and safety.

But just knowledge about health and safety is not enough. Our young workers must also be kept safe while actually on the job. Ministry of Labour inspectors pay special attention to the way companies manage new and young workers. The types of orientation, training and supervision given to new and young workers are all taken into account when an inspector visits a workplace.

As well, this past June, we had an inspection blitz to focus employers' attention on the responsibilities to keep young workers safe. The blitz was part of our Safe at Work Ontario health and safety strategy. We've also provided young worker health and safety information kits to all MPPs in the province so they can provide them to their constituents. I'm sure all members have found these kits useful.

1530

Over the last two years, our young worker tip sheets were distributed by the Ministry of Education to over one million students in grades 7 to 12, and our efforts are paying off. I'm proud to tell you that Ontario leads the country in improving workplace safety for young people. Lost-time injuries for young workers are decreasing, but that is not enough. There is more to be done.

Too many young and new workers are still injured on the job every year because of preventable accidents. No parent should ever have to wonder if their child will return home from work. No employer should have to summon a worker's loved ones to the hospital. And no young worker should ever be endangered in a job, period.

All on-the-job accidents are preventable, with the right training and safety precautions. It's up to all of us to create a generation of young workers that places a priority on safety. Take Our Kids to Work Day is a good time to start that. I encourage all Ontario employers to ensure that workplace health and safety is the top priority, tomorrow and every working day. One thing all of us can agree on: Our young workers—our sons, our daughters—have a right to return home safely from work every day.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

CRIME PREVENTION WEEK

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased to rise this afternoon and respond on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus to the statement by the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services on Crime Prevention Week.

I would like to, first of all, congratulate all of our police services in the province of Ontario who are ultimately responsible for policing and crime. I congratulate particularly Ron Middel from the Police Association of Ontario, the new executive director, and Larry Molyneux, the new president; as well, Karl Walsh of the Ontario Provincial Police Association, who's under the jurisdiction of Mr. Julian Fantino, the commissioner of the OPP; and in Toronto here, where we have a more serious crime problem, I'd like to congratulate Dave Wilson of the Toronto Police Association and, of course, Chief Bill Blair. These people all contribute and do their very best to look at the serious issues around crime in Ontario—and I know that most people do stand united in trying to remove crime. It scares me when I look at the TV almost every evening and see some serious occurrences that have happened somewhere in Ontario.

I would like to briefly respond to some of the comments made by the minister, though, on the additional police officers. There's no question there are another 1,000 police officers required in Ontario. I know the OPP want 500 of those officers. The municipal police services want 500 of those officers as well. I know the minister went ahead and signed on the dotted line with the federal government and accepted the \$156 million. Now they're standing here, and in every speech I've heard him say so far, he's complaining about the program. Why did they sign on the dotted line? The reality is, they accepted the terms and conditions of the agreement. So, as we move forward, we've got a lot of work to do.

I'll be happy to also work with the new community safety minister, Peter Van Loan. I look forward to working with him and, again, I want to thank all those responsible for trying to keep safety and peace on the streets of our province.

ADOPTION AWARENESS MONTH

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to be able to offer comments on behalf of the official opposition. However, I must begin by saying that I find it incredibly ironic that this minister, who's got an entire month in which to announce Adoption Awareness Month, would choose today, when we are dealing with an item by the third party on the very issue about which she has chosen to talk—adoption awareness, in looking at the NDP's opposition day motion.

Obviously, the question of adoption is extremely important, and to those individuals who have ever been a part of an adoption process—adoptees, the birth mothers and parents—the importance of this cannot be underestimated. For women who find themselves unable to raise a child, they can go ahead in the knowledge that there are responsible and loving people who wish to be able to have the privilege and the joy of being a parent. So certainly, it is something that we would all want to recognize as an important part of our process.

I was interested by the minister's comments today in the question of fewer children coming into care, because it seems to me that there are very serious issues that remain unaddressed: the question of the legal limbo of a crown ward status; timely adoption; and frankly, the issue around children—that one child is too many to die in care.

So while we look at adoption as a very positive process, we must be vigilant on the other side of that same coin.

TAKE OUR KIDS TO WORK DAY

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's a pleasure for me to rise today on behalf of the official opposition to respond to the Minister of Labour's statement on take your child to work day. I would like to encourage the men and women who run small business in Ontario to make sure they take advantage of take your child to work day this year, because if the minister's bill passes, some of them may not have that opportunity next year.

On behalf of the official opposition, I would like to encourage all Ontarians to participate in this program. Our young people benefit from seeing the workplace in action, giving students the opportunity to experience what the workplace is like. It gives them a chance to start thinking, at an early age, what they may want to do when they are done school.

Tomorrow, I will look forward to seeing many young people around Queen's Park. When you see them, I would encourage all members of the House to take the opportunity to welcome them to the Legislature and make them feel welcome.

TAKE OUR KIDS TO WORK DAY

Mr. Peter Kormos: To the Minister of Labour: Take Our Kids to Work Day? Tell that to the 800 workers at

John Deere in Welland; they don't have jobs anymore. They're not going to be taking their kids to work, any day. Say that to the 430 workers from DDM Plastics in Tillsonburg. Say that to the 300 jobs that were taken away from workers, and the workers who worked at those jobs, at GDX in Welland; 320 workers at PPG; 500 workers at Volvo in Goderich.

AbitibiBowater in Thorold—480 jobs gone for the whole month of November. They're not taking their kids to work on November 5. Progressive Moulded Products—2,000 jobs. Those workers aren't taking their kids to work. Magna's Formet Industries factory in St. Thomas—400 jobs. Those workers aren't taking their kids to work either.

You want to talk about making workplaces safer for young people? Then you let young people who work in the agricultural industry—some of the most dangerous workplaces in this province—join unions and organize and collectively bargain with their employers, because collective bargaining means safer workplaces.

You want young people to feel safer in their workplaces? You extend card-based certification to every worker in this province, so that those young workers can organize unions and collectively bargain safer workplaces.

CRIME PREVENTION WEEK

Mr. Peter Kormos: To the Solicitor General, the Minister of Community Safety: To make a statement today in the context of what's been happening in this city, in this province, over the course of the last year, two, three years about Crime Prevention Week, we've got hard-working cops, women and men out there, doing very dangerous work—understaffed, under-resourced—collecting evidence, arresting criminals, and then your bail courts send them right out the door, some of the most dangerous criminals in this province, so that they end up slaughtering and murdering innocent citizens.

Your Attorney General's crown attorneys are plea bargaining away some of the most serious charges because of the sausage factory culture in our courtrooms, and those same attorneys are striking sweetheart deals around sentences. You talk about being tough on crime. Heck, John Snobelen can import a handgun, stash it in the house and get a conditional discharge, not even a criminal record, and you wouldn't appeal that sentence.

You're not tough on crime; you're soft on crime. You're a disappointment to the innocent people of this province and the cops who work so hard.

ADOPTION AWARENESS MONTH

Ms. Andrea Horwath: New Democrats, of course, do see adoption as an important part of the welfare framework that supports Ontario's children. We know very well that adoptive parents do really good work in this province, and often take care of children at very, very difficult times. We also know that it was a New Demo-

crat that started making some real, positive change in terms of the adoption system in the province of Ontario, our friend and former colleague Marilyn Churley.

But when the minister gets up, on a day like today, with our opposition motion on the order paper as it is, and says, "We're working to help every child in Ontario succeed"—she can say that in this House, when she knows darn well that there are grandparents here who are trying to do exactly that and this government is pulling the rug out from under their feet? Shame on them. It's no wonder they burst out in laughter. It's surprising they didn't burst out in tears to see such a callous government as the one that sits across from us today.

1540

We all know, of course, as the minister says, that the love of a family in a home is the foundation of that success. Well, what about the foundation that these grandmothers provide to their grandkids every single day in this province? What about those families?

We're going to hear a lot more about this this afternoon. And I have to say this to the ministers, both of them, across the way: We have a situation in this province where there are loving grandparents who are parenting their children's children, and they are doing that in very difficult times. They are not doing that on a lot of money. This minister previously talked about children, sometimes in special circumstances, with special needs. Every single one of these grandchildren who are being cared for by their grandparents are children who have special needs. They have the need of the love of their grandparents. They have the need of the stability of a good home.

It's shameful that this government, instead of making sure that these grandparents are provided with the resources that they need to ensure that they can provide a decent quality of life for these children, instead of helping these grandparents to make sure that those kids get the stability that they need, get the income that they need to have a good quality of life, what do they do? They tell the grandparents, "No, we don't think that you're good enough anymore to get extra help. We don't think that it's appropriate for us to be providing you with a little bit of extra help." What's the solution? One of the grandparents told me just a few moments ago that she was horrified to know that her 15-year-old granddaughter heard the minister say, "Well, they could always go to welfare or they have other solutions"—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I believe we have unanimous consent to make comments with respect to Remembrance Day.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed. Minister of Government Services.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: As a citizen of one of the greatest countries in the world, and one privileged to serve our community as a member of provincial Parlia-

ment, I am both proud and honoured to have the opportunity this afternoon to make this statement on behalf of the government of Ontario.

November is the month we pay respect to the men and women who so bravely risked their lives in defence of freedom, and November 11 is a day we formally honour these brave men and women. We call it Remembrance Day for a good reason: We remember what they did for us and we remember to tie together those wars of yesterday with our freedoms today and our children's dreams for peace tomorrow.

For remembrance to be lasting, it must be intergenerational. That's why we need to make sure school children continue to learn about the significance of Remembrance Day and develop an appreciation for living in the greatest country in the world. Through classroom visits from veterans in the Memory Project to stories passed down through generations, those memories of brave Canadian soldiers last a lifetime and they continue to inspire us all. After all, they traded their tomorrows for our todays.

They are the more than 1.5 million Canadians who served in the First and Second World Wars and the Korean War, and they are the more than 100,000 who gave their lives in those conflicts. These brave men and women chose to cross an ocean to fight injustice, and the peace we enjoy today is their legacy. There are fewer and fewer of these veterans still alive today, but through all of us they live on in our memory.

Only recently, we lost another of our war heroes. Charley Fox was a D-Day veteran and double winner of the Distinguished Flying Cross. The Spitfire pilot from London, Ontario, gained fame during World War II for injuring German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel. But perhaps he did his best work after he came home, dedicating his life to educating our youth about Canada's military past, for Charley Fox always made it clear that we should never forget how fortunate we are to live in Canada; we should never forget those who brought tyranny to its knees; and we must never forget that the reason they fought and died was so that your children and mine could live in peace.

I want to welcome the family of Charley Fox to the Legislature. We are truly honoured that you are here today. Thank you so much for coming.

Through his family, I also want to thank Charley Fox and indeed all of those brave soldiers for the freedom that we are able to experience today; a freedom that I know came with a very high price. The pain and hardship endured by those who served in times of war are something that many of us today can never truly imagine or appreciate. There are still Canadians today going overseas to fight injustice in Afghanistan, of course, and in other hot spots where our world-renowned peacekeepers are needed.

As someone who spent some time with the peacekeepers in Cyprus, I can tell you first-hand that those Canadians overseas today are just as proud and brave as their fathers, mothers and grandparents who went before them. Like those before them, those who fought to defend freedom at home and extend it abroad left behind

their friends and family, hopeful that they would be able to return home but knowing that duty to country comes first. They will experience the horrors of war first-hand. Some will be seriously wounded, and some, terribly, will pay the ultimate price.

My late father was one of those lucky ones who went to war and survived. He and all others who came home immediately went to work in reshaping this great nation—a country where freedom from that time forward would walk hand in hand with good health and personal prosperity. I'm sure many members in this House today also had relatives who went to war. Perhaps some of them never made it back. It's difficult to imagine the experiences they endured, but we can strive to remember and honour their bravery and selflessness. Remembrance Day, November 11, and Veterans' Week, commemorated each year from November 5 to November 11, provide an opportunity to remember those Canadians who so valiantly served this country.

Next week, members of this House will be in their hometowns as part of constituency week. We will stand with veterans and young children at a Remembrance Day ceremony or a commemorative event in our community. At the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, as has been the custom since the end of the First World War, Ontarians across this country will bow their heads in silent remembrance of those who fought for our freedom and those who made the ultimate sacrifice on our behalf.

Speaker, I'm pleased to inform you and this House that the Ontario government has asked its employees to support the Royal Canadian Legion's two-minute wave of silence, which will sweep all across Canada, beginning at 11 a.m. local time. At that time, we hope that everyone will join us to pause and remember the sacrifices of others.

In honour of the many men and women who fought with so much distinction, a 30-metre-long granite memorial wall on the south lawn of this Legislature stands as a wonderful tribute to veterans past and present. I invite all members of this assembly and the public to spend a few minutes at this wall over the next week or so. I want to thank my predecessor, the Minister of Government Services, Gerry Phillips, for ensuring that this monument will leave a lasting impression for Canadians everywhere. The wall is a fitting tribute to the heroism, dedication and loyalty of those who served in our armed forces. As politicians, we serve the people, perhaps not in the way our fighting fathers and mothers did, but still, we serve the public to the best of our abilities. People don't always agree with us, and they often let us know that they're not pleased. That's a good thing. Even in this Legislature, we disagree on politics and policies, and we argue our points, quite strongly on some occasions. That, too, is a good thing. It's good because in this country, we are free to disagree, we are free to have opinions, and we're free to express those opinions.

1550

This freedom is thanks in no small part to the veterans of great and terrible wars. Let us celebrate our shared

humanity by continually striving to live together in harmony and peace. As we continue our efforts to afford everyone the human rights and dignity we enjoy, let us make a sacred promise to cherish our privileges and respect how they were earned. Lest we forget, let us pledge together we will always remember.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'm humbled and proud to deliver remarks on Remembrance Day and the late Charley Fox on behalf of Her Majesty's loyal opposition. I'd also like to welcome my friends and Charley's friends in the gallery today, as well as Charley's family.

Last year on this same week, in this esteemed House, I was fortunate to host someone who I would later learn was one of the major actors in World War II, who would shape the days after D-Day and the German response to our allied forces. He would change the course of history. He was a hero. He had finished the war with 222 operational missions and the Distinguished Flying Cross and bar. He was the Canadian pilot who stopped German field marshal Erwin Rommel in his tracks. And he was an Ontarian.

Charley Fox was all that we could have hoped for in a homegrown hero. He was brave, and he was humble. He wanted to share all that he had ever learned with each of us.

One year ago, I was blessed to have Charley Fox join me and my family as I was sworn into the 39th provincial Parliament in Ontario. It was an occasion that I will always remember. On that day, in this chamber in this House, the Indo-Canadian community was celebrating Diwali at Queen's Park. Charley joined me at that celebration. He was wearing his medals, his poppy and his pride in Canada and all that our country had become since the days when he and so many other people fought for our freedom. They fought for our right to assemble, and they fought for the very diversity that we prize in this country.

And on that day, in this Legislature, meeting Charley was like meeting someone from my favourite book. As a student of Canadian heritage, culture, and most of all identity, to me Charley was a living example of what it was like to be a Canadian. Charley was modest, he was proud, he was passionate, and he was a patriotic Canadian.

He spent his years after the war asking two questions: "Why did I survive the war? And how can I ensure that the enduring legacy of our veterans, those men and women who sacrificed for our country, lives on?" Thus began his lifelong mission to remind all of us of the importance of Remembrance Day, November 11.

Charley worked hard for Torch Bearers so he could inform schools, the military and other community organizations, like many of the historical societies in our communities, of the stories of our Canadian veterans. Charley Fox wanted to give veterans a voice, and there were few things more important to him than that.

But I do know he was proud of his family. His presence was so sought after that I am informed that even

you, our esteemed Speaker of this Legislature, were to have attended an event with him this weekend.

It is only fitting, of course, that today's tribute to Charley Fox fall alongside the very mark of respect for remembrance that he worked all these years to preserve, and that this mark of respect would take place in this chamber that stands strong in peace and defiant in the face of the tyranny that Charley Fox and the men and women of our Canadian Armed Forces faced who have served our country so valiantly in all of our wars and conflicts that they fought against. Charley's story will continue, of course. His family is here today and they will finish the book, *Why Not Me?*, and they will complete a project in Charley's memory that all members in this Legislature are invited to take part in.

But in this chamber, it is up to us. It is our obligation to remind people of their noble efforts that preserve and protect our just society. We debate issues of the day in this chamber in absolute freedom. It should always be remembered that this absolute freedom came with a price. To this day it continues to come at a price, as my colleague from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke will tell you, when he has to see so many young women and men come back from Afghanistan. So when we see our soldiers and our veterans with their medals—some of whom are old, but increasingly they are younger—we must remember to thank them for their service that has kept and continues to keep Canada the true north, strong and free.

On November 11, fallen soldiers and now-deceased veterans like Charley will not be forgotten. We will be reminded that their sacrifice made way for our liberties, we will be reminded that the honour with which they served shaped our democracy, and we will remember that those values that we hold so dear, which include those fundamental freedoms of democracy and liberty, are a direct result of their selflessness and their patriotism.

My dear friends, both in this chamber and watching us in their homes throughout Ontario, please take the time this week to honour our veterans and our soldiers. I urge Ontarians across this great province to remember our heroes, like Charley Fox, like my own grandfather, and so many of you who I know in this chamber had people serving, whether it was in Canada or for other nations, whom you are so proud of. I want you to thank them because they put their freedom and their own security above themselves. They did this for us.

I want to conclude with these few verses of poetry, which were put to music by Terry Kelly. He's a folk singer from the Maritimes:

They fought and some died for their homeland
They fought and some died now it's our land
Look at his little child, there's no fear in her eyes
Could he not show respect for other dads who have died?

Take two minutes, would you mind?

It's a pittance of time

For the boys and the girls who went over

In peace may they rest, may we never forget why they died....

Read the letters and poems of the heroes at home
They have casualties, battles, and fears of their own
There's a price to be paid if you go, if you stay
Freedom is fought for and won in numerous ways....

It takes courage to fight in your own war
It takes courage to fight someone else's war
Our peacekeepers tell of their own living hell
They bring hope to foreign lands that the hatemongers can't kill....

In Peace may they rest, lest we forget why they died.
Take a pittance of time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to our veterans.

Mr. Howard Hampton: On behalf of the New Democrats, I want to welcome Sue Beckett, the daughter of Charley Fox; Ryan Beckett, grandson; Todd Fox, grandson, and Cheryl Fox, daughter-in-law, and all of the friends and family of Charley Fox here today.

I always find Remembrance Day to be a day of irony, because Canadians pride ourselves on living in one of the most peaceful countries in the world. We pride ourselves, we promote ourselves in the world as being one of the most peaceful places on this planet. Yet the irony is that this peaceful country has had much of its history written by volunteers on battlefields elsewhere in the world.

1600

I think we must all recognize and remind ourselves that whether it be the second war or the first war or the Korean War, these people were virtually all volunteers. No one said to people in the Korean War, "You must go." No one said in the second war, "You must go." Even in the first war, the conscription crisis came too late in the war to really make a difference. The people who have written the history in Vimy Ridge or Ypres or Cambrai or Passchendaele—now the subject of a movie by the Canadian actor and producer Paul Gross—or Dieppe or Ortona or the Liri Valley or Monte Cassino or the Battle of Britain or the Battle of the Atlantic or Normandy or Falaise or the Battle for Holland or the Rhineland, all of these people were volunteers.

They were an incredible generation, and we are witnessing now—and I say this very much to the Fox family—the passing of a very great generation, perhaps the greatest generation that Canada has ever known, a generation that, as I say, volunteered to leave Canada and go to far-off places. Some are buried in Hong Kong. Some are buried in Tokyo. Some are buried in Africa, Malaysia, Singapore, India, South and Central America and throughout Europe, by the thousands.

One of the most touching things I've ever done was to go to the Canadian War Cemetery in Normandy, walk down a line of 10 graves and see that every one of those young men was 18 years old when he died. I look around this room, and most of us are privileged enough to have lived three times as long as those young men.

But it was not just the sacrifice that was made there. This was a generation—not only did they win the war, but more incredibly, they have won the peace, the peace

that every one of us in this room has had the privilege to enjoy. Not only did they win the peace, but these were the very people who had the foresight to put in place the international institutions that have done so much to create and preserve the peace, not just in Canada but the world over. The person who drafted the very articles for the United Nations, who went to the United Nations conference, was a Canadian, a member of that generation.

They have contributed in other ways as well. It took me a while when I was a kid growing up, but when I got to be about 11 or 12 years old and my dad took me to my first Remembrance Day ceremony, I realized that my first hockey coach had been a veteran. From a First Nations community in northwestern Ontario, he had volunteered like all the others. He'd fought in Normandy, he'd fought in Falaise, he fought through Belgium, through Holland.

He's still alive; he's one of those who are still fortunate enough to still be alive. When I talk to him, he tells me about all his friends who were buried in Normandy, who were buried at Dieppe, who were buried in Holland and Belgium, and yes, even in Germany. He's a wonderful man, a quiet man. You'd never, ever know if you talked to him that this was someone who displayed that courage over and over again. As a hockey coach, he would come up to you and tap you on the shoulder and never holler at you. He'd say, "I didn't think that was the best play you made today." He's patient, loving, kind, giving, and that's how so many of those people have lived their lives since they've come home.

It was later on when I was a kid growing up, I realized that just about every coach and every referee I had in minor hockey had been a veteran. I remember asking one of them, when I finished high school and came home from playing hockey in the United States, "How could this be?" He said, "Look, most of us never got to experience that. Most of our youth was lived during the Depression and our teenagehood was lived in the army or the air force or the navy. We never got to experience those things, and we wanted to make sure that our kids and our grandkids were not going to miss out on those things that so many of us didn't have." That was the kind of unselfishness.

Next Tuesday, we will honour not only those who made the supreme sacrifice, but as my colleague in the Conservative caucus has pointed out, we will also honour what I believe to be the greatest generation of Canadians, who continue to make an incredible contribution to the quality of life that we enjoy. We owe them so much. We can never repay the debt. We can never hope to accomplish what so many of them have accomplished, both in life and in death.

Let's make sure this is a special Remembrance Day, because many of this greatest generation may not be around for the next Remembrance Day.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd ask all the members and all of our guests to please rise as we observe two minutes of silence in memory of Charley Fox and out of respect for Remembrance Day.

The House observed two minutes' silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

PETITIONS

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the skyrocketing price of gasoline is causing hardship to families across Ontario; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberal government charges a gasoline tax of 14.7 cents per litre to drivers in all parts of Ontario; and

"Whereas gasoline tax revenues now go exclusively to big cities with transit systems, while roads and bridges crumble in other communities across Ontario; and

"Whereas residents of Wellington-Halton Hills have been shut out of provincial gasoline tax revenues to which they have contributed; and

"Whereas whatever one-time money has flowed to municipalities from the McGuinty Liberal government has been neither stable nor predictable and has been insufficient to meet our infrastructure needs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to redistribute provincial gasoline tax revenues fairly to all communities across the province."

I support this petition and affix my signature.

1610

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly signed by many people who picked it up in the offices of their doctors. It reads as follows:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I am pleased to sign and to certainly support this petition and to ask page Laura to carry it for me.

EMERGENCY DISPATCH SERVICES

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with 911 emergency communication services in Parry Sound-Muskoka. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is considering relocating emergency ambulance and fire dispatch services currently provided by Muskoka Ambulance Communications Service to the city of Barrie; and

"Whereas up to 40% of all calls received are from cellphones from people unfamiliar with the area; and

"Whereas Muskoka-Parry Sound residents have grave concerns about the effect on emergency response times if dispatch services are provided by dispatchers who are not familiar with the area; and

"Whereas 16 Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care-funded jobs, held by qualified communication officers from local communities, may be lost as a result of the relocation of dispatch services to the city of Barrie,

"Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario put the safety, health and economic concerns of the people of Muskoka-Parry Sound ahead of government efficiency interests and ensure that emergency dispatch services continue to be provided locally by Muskoka Ambulance Communications Service."

I support this petition.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services has launched a blatant attack on our province's grandparents raising their at-risk grandchildren by cutting off access to the temporary care assistance program;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislature call on the minister to overturn her July 2008 directive outlining the temporary care assistance program and grant all grandparents raising their at-risk grandchildren access to the much-needed financial support."

I agree with this and hereby affix my name to it.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Kim Craiton: I am pleased to read this petition in again. It's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents, as requested in Bill 33.

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreason-

ably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and" their "grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly ... to amend the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

I'm pleased to sign my signature in support of this petition.

TUITION

Mr. Jim Wilson: I have another petition from the Canadian Federation of Students, this time from the graduate student society in Windsor. To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas undergraduate tuition fees in Ontario have increased by 195% since 1990 and are the third-highest in all of the provinces in Canada; and

"Whereas average student debt in Ontario has skyrocketed by 250% in the last 15 years to over \$25,000 for four years of study; and

"Whereas international students pay three to four times more for the same education, and domestic students in professional programs such as law or medicine pay as much tuition as \$20,000 per year; and

"Whereas 70% of new jobs require post-secondary education, and fees reduce the opportunity for many low- and middle-income families while magnifying barriers for aboriginal, rural, racialized and other marginalized students; and

"Whereas Ontario currently provides the lowest per capita funding for post-secondary education in Canada, while many countries fully fund higher education and charge little or no fees for college and university; and

"Whereas public opinion polls show that nearly three quarters of Ontarians think the government's Reaching Higher framework for tuition fee increases of 20% to 36% over four years is unfair;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, support the Canadian Federation of Students' call to immediately drop tuition fees to 2004 levels and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to introduce a new framework that:

"(1) Reduces tuition and ancillary fees annually for students.

"(2) Converts a portion of every student loan into a grant.

"(3) Increases per student funding above the national average."

I agree with this petition, and I've signed it.

WORKPLACE HARASSMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I have a petition that was gathered by Kathy Le from Toronto.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas workplace harassment (physical/psychological) and violence are linked to the mental and physical ill-health and safety of workers in Ontario; and

"Whereas harassment and violence need to be defined as violations of the Occupational Health and Safety Act so that it is dealt with as quickly and earnestly by employers as other health and safety issues; and

"Whereas employers will have a legal avenue and/or a legal obligation to deal with workplace harassment and violence in all its forms, including psychological harassment; and

"Whereas harassment poisons the workplace, taking many forms—verbal/physical abuse, sabotage, intimidation, bullying, sexism and racism, and should not be tolerated; and

"Whereas harassment in any form harms a targets physical and mental health, esteem and productivity, and contributes to trauma and stress on the job; and

"Whereas Bill 29 would make it the law to protect workers from workplace harassment by giving workers the right to refuse work after harassment has occurred, requiring the investigation of allegations of workplace-related harassment and oblige employers to take steps to prevent further occurrences of workplace-related harassment;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to treat workplace harassment and violence as a serious health and safety issue by passing MPP Andrea Horwath's Bill 29, which would bring workplace harassment and violence under the scope of the Occupational Health and Safety Act."

I agree with this petition, sign it, and send it to the table by way of page Helen.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Joe Dickson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Rouge Valley Health board reversed the 2006 announcement closing the maternity and pediatric services at the Ajax-Pickering hospital due to an overwhelming public outcry; and

"Whereas the Rouge Valley Health board of directors has recently approved closing the 20-bed mental health unit at the Ajax-Pickering hospital; and

"Whereas there remains further concern by residents for future maternity/pediatric closings ... even with the Ontario Ministry of Health's largest-ever expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital; and

"Whereas there is a natural boundary, the Rouge Valley, that clearly separates the two distinct areas of Scarborough and Durham region;

"We, the undersigned, therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Central East Local Health Integration Network (CE-LHIN) and the Rouge Valley Health System (RVHS) board of directors review the Rouge Valley Health System makeup and group Scarborough Centenary hospital with the three other Scarborough hospitals; and

"Further, that we position Ajax-Pickering hospital within Lakeridge Health, thus combining all of our hospitals in Durham region under one Durham region administration."

I affix my signature to this and shall pass it to Chloe.

1620

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. John Yakabuski: I have petitions from all across the province of Ontario on this issue. Today, I have one signed by the people from the township of Admaston and Bromley in my riding.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the skyrocketing price of gasoline is causing hardship to families across Ontario; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberal government charges a gasoline tax of 14.7 cents per litre to drivers in all parts of Ontario; and

"Whereas gasoline tax revenues now go exclusively to big cities with transit systems, while roads and bridges crumble in other communities across Ontario; and

"Whereas residents of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke have been shut out of provincial gasoline tax revenues to which they have contributed; and

"Whereas whatever one-time money has flowed to municipalities from the McGuinty Liberal government has been neither stable nor predictable and has been insufficient to meet our infrastructure needs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to redistribute provincial gasoline tax revenues fairly to all communities across the province."

I affix my signature to this and send it down with Willem.

PROTECTION FOR MINERS

M^{me} France G  linas: I have a petition from the people of Deep River, Mattawa and Ottawa.

"Whereas the current legislation contained in the Ontario health and safety act and regulations for mines and mining plants does not adequately protect the lives of miners, we request revisions to the act;

"Lyle Everett Defoe and the scoop tram he was operating fell 150 feet down an open stope (July 23, 2007). Lyle was 25 years and 15 days old when he was killed at Xstrata Kidd Creek mine site, Timmins."

The mining regulation states that, "A shaft, raise or other opening in an underground mine shall be securely fenced, covered or otherwise guarded.... The stope where Lyle was killed was protected by a length of orange plastic snow fence and a rope with a warning sign. These barriers would not have been visible if the bucket of the scoop tram was raised. Lyle's body was recovered from behind the scoop tram."

They ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to modify the act as follows:

"Concrete berms must be mandatory to protect all open stopes and raises;

"All miners and contractors working underground must have working communication devices and personal locators;

"All equipment involved in injuries and fatalities must be recovered and examined unless such recovery would endanger the lives of others; and

"The entire act must be reviewed and amended to better protect underground workers."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and send to it table with page Kevin.

LOGGING ROUTE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with logging through the village of Restoule, and it reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Nipissing forest management plan proposes to use Hawthorne Drive in Restoule, which features a single-lane bridge and narrow and steep sections; and

"Whereas area residents have grave concerns about community safety, traffic speed, truck noise and general wear and tear of Hawthorne Drive and the bridge in the village of Restoule; and

"Whereas the proposed route travels past the Restoule Canadian Legion and two churches; and

"Whereas alternative routes are possible via Odorizzi Road and Block 09-056;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario put the safety and concerns of the people of Restoule ahead of logging interests and ensure an alternate route is selected for the Nipissing forest management plan."

I support this petition.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I got in in the nick of time. I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas understaffing in Ontario's nursing homes is a serious problem resulting in inadequate care for residents and unsafe conditions for staff;

"Whereas after the Harris government removed the regulations providing minimum care levels in 1995, hours of care dropped below the previous 2.25 hour/day minimum;

"Whereas the recent improvements in hours of care are not adequate, vary widely and are not held to accountable standards;

"Whereas there is currently nothing in legislation to protect residents and staff from renewed cuts to care levels by future governments; and

"Whereas care needs have measurably increased with aging and the movement of people with more complex health needs from hospitals into long-term-care homes;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Immediately enact and fund an average care standard of 3.5 hours per resident per day in the regulations under the new Long-Term Care Homes Act."

This is from people in the Monteith area, and I affix my signature.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Before I call orders of the day, I wish to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 38, the member from Timmins-James Bay has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question last Thursday to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines regarding the Xstrata strike. This matter will be debated at 6 p.m. today.

OPPOSITION DAY

CHILD CARE

GARDE D'ENFANTS

Mr. Howard Hampton: This is the NDP opposition day motion:

Whereas adult caregivers such as grandparents and other custodians do their best to provide stability for children placed in their care due to often unforeseen and unfortunate circumstances; and

Whereas the duration of custody often extends for an indeterminate length of time and previous regulations recognized the realities of these custodial relationships; and

Whereas most seniors—meaning grandparents—are ineligible for Ontario Works assistance on the basis of their eligibility for seniors' income assistance programs that have no provisions to address the custodial responsibilities of these individuals; and

Whereas grandparents are ineligible for foster parents supports and the Ministry of Community and Social Services' temporary care assistance provision was the only program available to these custodial grandparents

before the McGuinty government eliminated this assistance by changing the provisions in July 2008;

The Legislative Assembly of Ontario calls on the McGuinty government to undo its punitive revisions to the Ministry of Community and Social Services' temporary care assistance directive and support Ontario's grandparents and other temporary caregivers as they seek to work in the best interests of some of Ontario's most vulnerable children. Addressed to the Premier of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Mr. Hampton, the leader of the New Democratic Party and member for Kenora-Rainy River, has moved opposition day motion number 4. I recognize the member to lead off.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Thank you, Speaker, for this opportunity to address what is a very serious concern for a number of children and a number of grandchildren across this province.

The McGuinty government has talked a lot about its commitment to give all children a fair chance in Ontario. It talks a lot about how it is the first government to set targets for poverty reduction. It talks a lot about its new Ontario child benefit. But here's the reality: In its first mandate, when the economy was growing, child and family poverty were also growing in Ontario. Ontario has become the child poverty capital of Canada. One in eight children in Ontario are now growing up in poverty.

The best the McGuinty government seems to be able to deliver is a lot of talk, and actions that are inconsistent with its talk. For example, it talks a lot, as I say, about its child benefit, but in the process, it cuts off the back-to-school clothing allowance for those kids and it cuts off the winter clothing allowance for those kids. It talks a lot about ending the clawback of the national child benefit, but then implements clawbacks and cuts to basic social assistance rates so families are no further ahead. It talks a lot about raising the minimum wage, but keeps the minimum wage below the poverty line. It makes grand announcements on affordable housing, but then when you come along six months or a year later, you find the announcements never happened and that only half of the number of units of affordable housing were in fact built.

Then there was the announcement this summer—or should I say, the secretive announcement—whereby the Ministry of Community and Social Services issued a directive to cut off financial support from grandparents who act as the primary caregivers for their grandchildren. Yes, we're talking about the temporary care assistance program. That is the subject of our motion.

We are calling on the McGuinty government to stop the double-talk and to reinstate the eligibility of grandparents and other temporary caregivers for this badly needed and modest financial support that the grandparents receive when they're looking after their grandchildren. We're calling on the McGuinty government to stop saying that child poverty is important but then doing things which, in fact, can result in child poverty. Stop announcing programs like the low-income dental program and then putting them on the shelf for months and

months. Start showing some urgency about really taking on poverty. The best place to start is with the changes to the temporary care assistance program that need to be reversed.

1630

In July, the Ministry of Community and Social Services issued a directive which had the effect of toughening the rules of the temporary care assistance program and making it nearly impossible for grandparents raising their own grandchildren to access this much-needed financial support. The directive that was issued in July removed any reference to grandparents and emphasized that any support should be temporary, meaning short-term. The former rule stated that no time limits are set on the availability of temporary care assistance and that temporary care assistance may be needed for years. The new rules of the McGuinty government issued in July have eliminated these references and instead emphasize that assistance is for a short period. Program administrators are now instructed to evaluate the length of the child's stay and ensure that the child's stay is in fact temporary, meaning short-term.

How does a grandparent say to a child, "Well, I can only look after you short-term; then you're on your own"? How does a grandparent do that? Who in their right mind would force a loving grandparent to do that? But that's the effect. Grandparents can't look after their grandchild who is in need of care for a few months and then say, "Oh, well, I guess you have to go elsewhere." But that's the effect of what the McGuinty government is trying to do. Why would a government put in place a directive that would exclude caregivers such as grandparents, whose care and support is badly needed by these children who can no longer be cared for by their parents?

To put it in contrast, foster parents who provide ongoing care to children continue to receive \$900 a month per child from the Ontario government. Yet grandparents who step in to provide ongoing care to children who need care don't receive \$900. In fact, the McGuinty government wants to take away the modest \$200 a month that they previously received. Why on earth would a government that says it cares about looking after children want to put grandchildren being raised by their grandparents into the untenable situation of having no income because they are living in a family situation?

As mentioned by my colleague for Hamilton East-Stoney Creek yesterday, a grandparent who came forward to him is a 74-year-old grandmother who has been raising her grandchild, but she, the grandmother, has recently been diagnosed with cancer. Last Friday, she was told by officials acting on the behest of the McGuinty government that she is being cut off from temporary care assistance. However, she was told that she could return her grandchild to the biological mother.

Well, here's the situation. The biological mother is in a mental health facility, and the biological father is an alcoholic—someone who has a hard time looking after himself, never mind looking after his child. This is the untenable situation that the McGuinty government is now

putting some of the most vulnerable grandchildren in this province in. With the additional cost of her health care, both physically and financially, this grandmother can now no longer afford to keep her house. Her grandchild has lived with her for 10 years, and now both face a very bleak future as a result of this punitive directive from the McGuinty government. The minuscule \$231 a month that she received was the difference between their being able to continue to live in the house and now likely losing it.

I think government members should read this new directive, because this new directive goes over the top. What it says is that if a grandparent shows a "settled intent" to treat their grandchild as their child or shows a settled intent to create a permanency of care or permanency of conditions for the child, then the grandparent should lose the temporary care assistance. There's an indicia, a list of points. "Settled intent" can be shown by the length of a child's stay. So if you're a grandparent and you look after your child for a couple of years, you've shown a settled intent and you lose the benefit.

If, as a grandparent, you make arrangements to physically accommodate your grandchild—imagine this: A loving grandparent says, "You're going to live with me now. There's no one else to look after you, so we're going to set up a bedroom for you." That's a showing of settled intent to physically accommodate the child; you lose the benefit. If there are custody orders, you can lose the benefit. If there's an involvement by the grandparent in medical, educational and recreational activities for the child, you can lose the benefit. Imagine: A loving grandparent wants to make sure that this grandchild receives appropriate medical help, receives appropriate educational assistance and maybe even gets to play soccer or maybe even gets to go to swimming lessons. These are reasons, according to the McGuinty government, to take away the temporary care assistance—involvement in decisions with respect to the child's health and well-being.

Interruption.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I apologize for interrupting the leader of the New Democratic Party, but I must say to our visitors who are here today: We welcome you here and we appreciate your presence, but it is inappropriate for you to engage in any verbal outbursts, as much as you may agree with one of the speakers who's participating in the debate.

I return to the leader of the New Democratic Party.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Actually, Speaker, I thank you for the intervention because it is my colleague from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek who has taken the time, the care and the effort to raise these issues.

I simply want to say this: I urge all members of the McGuinty government to look at this directive because I think it's indefensible. I don't think you can, at the one hand, on the one side of your mouth, claim as a government that you care about child poverty and that you want to help children, and then cut off grandparents who are merely trying to provide loving care and assistance to their grandchildren who cannot get care otherwise—cut them off from \$231 a month.

Look at them and ask yourself, is this the direction, as a government, that you think you ought to go in? I don't think this directive can be defended. I think it is punitive; I think it is harsh; I think it is punishing to some of the most vulnerable children in this province and deserves and needs to be reversed immediately.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I'm here today to address the issue of temporary care assistance, an issue that has received quite a bit of attention lately. To those of you unfamiliar with this initiative, temporary care assistance is a program available through Ontario Works that provides financial support to non-parental caregivers who are temporarily caring for a child that they don't have the legal obligation to support.

It is a program that is particularly relevant when parents are not able to take care of their child for a temporary period. Reasons can be as wide as the parents being hospitalized or being subject to domestic violence or drug addictions. It is an important program, and our government has demonstrated its ongoing commitment to helping families and children in need.

1640

I would like to start by thanking these temporary caregivers who look after extended family members. These temporary caregivers can be related to the child, sometimes they can just be friends or neighbours, and some of these temporary caregivers happen to be grandparents. Our government understands and appreciates the significant contributions that they make and the support they give to children who need a home. They take in children, giving them a stable life and a better chance of a successful future. These temporary caregivers are a vital part of a child's life and can make all the difference in the world, and we recognize their hard work.

Now there has been quite a bit of talk about people losing their temporary care assistance. I have read in the media that the rules have changed, that the government all of a sudden is refusing money to families who need it most. Nothing could be further from the truth. We have been steadfast in our support for families in need, and I want to make it clear: We have not changed the rules governing eligibility for the temporary care assistance program. To do so, legislative changes would have been required. We have simply clarified the guidelines to better support Ontario Works administrators in making decisions about the child's eligibility. This clarification was part of a larger exercise to update all Ontario Works policy guidelines. This was not an isolated effort focused on temporary care assistance.

First, I would like to highlight the fact that TCA is not income-tested on the caregiver. This means that a caregiver making \$30,000, \$40,000, \$50,000 or \$70,000 could still receive TCA. I would like to also point out there has been no significant variation in the temporary care assistance caseload since the guidelines were updated.

Some members of the third party take this issue very personally, but they should check their facts before mak-

ing accusations. I would be curious to learn where the member of Hamilton East-Stoney Creek got his numbers when he makes the allegation that my ministry has cut off hundreds of people following the update of the guidelines. Had he checked with us, he would have learned that the TCA caseload has remained relatively constant over the last six months.

I would also like to address the concerns of the member from Hamilton Centre, who stood up in the House last week. She asked me three things: first, that grandchildren being raised by grandparents be eligible for TCA; second, that there be no time limit to be eligible for TCA; and third, that the duration of care should not constitute grounds to deny TCA to those children in need.

Let me answer yet again the member of Hamilton Centre: Nothing has changed. Point one, done. If children taken care of by their grandparents are eligible for TCA, they will receive TCA no matter what the grandparents' income is. Point two, done. The updated guidelines still make it clear that there is no set time limit for temporary care assistance and that eligibility determinations are made on a case-by-case basis, based on individual circumstances. Point three, done. It's the child's overall circumstances that determine eligibility. Some TCA beneficiaries are on this program for years, and they will not become ineligible for that single reason.

Administrators have always been required to assess whether the relationship is temporary or permanent. This is, in fact, supported under legislation that was adopted by previous governments. As I have said, any change to policy would require a change to legislation. You would know if the legislation had been amended; this is not the case.

I can also assure you that we are continuing to increase our investment in temporary care assistance. Since taking office, we have increased temporary care assistance benefits by 7%. These benefits are going to increase by another 2% next month. Have I mentioned that the opposition parties voted against these increases? We have invested almost \$13 million in this program this year, an increase of 14% from last year. Have I mentioned that under the Tories, the TCA budget was reduced from \$14.5 million to \$8.9 million? Under the Liberal leadership, our ongoing support for this program will go a long way in helping the nearly 5,700 children in Ontario who benefit from temporary care assistance.

Temporary care assistance is just one way that we are helping families and temporary caregivers in need. We have other supports available for them. We have committed more than \$2 billion to the Ontario child benefit to help our province's most vulnerable children have the opportunity to achieve their full potential. This initiative will reach 1.3 million Ontario children and more than 600,000 low-income families and temporary caregivers, making a positive difference in their lives. It also provides a simple income-tested financial benefit to low- and moderate-income families with children under 18, regardless of whether or not they receive social assistance.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would ask the minister to take her seat, and I would ask the member for Timmins-James Bay to refrain from heckling the minister. I return to the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Low-income families and temporary caregivers in need may also be able to access other financial supports for their children, such as the Canada child tax benefit and the national child benefit supplement. All of these federal benefits are exempt as income from social assistance, including temporary care assistance.

Let me explain with an example: A grandmother caring for two grandchildren who qualifies for the maximum benefit amount of temporary care assistance will receive nearly \$420 per month. If she qualifies for the other government benefits I just outlined, she could receive more than \$1,000 per month. As you can see, there are several programs available to help Ontario's families, temporary caregivers and children. At the end of the day, our government will never turn our back on low-income, hard-working families.

I know first-hand what it is to welcome a child who has nowhere to go. When I was a child at home, my parents opened their hearts and their door to two young boys. One of them, his mother had passed away. His dad had eight children and couldn't cope with them, so we took one child home, Benoit. I will always remember. To this day, he still visits us. He was like a brother to us. My mother never asked a question, never asked if she would be compensated for that. She welcomed that young boy at home.

Another time we had Francis, who was in an orphanage and had no place to go for Christmas. We took him home for Christmas and all of the holidays after. It was so rewarding for us, and to this day, he continues to visit us. I could go on. I come from a family where they open their door and their hearts.

But for those who need support, this Ontario government has the temporary care assistance. Other provinces don't have this program; Quebec, for instance.

Thank you for allowing me to speak. At the end of the day, our government, again, will never turn their back on low-income hard-working families, especially when these families are helping to provide better outcomes for children.

1650

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to rise on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus to speak on this important resolution. I must thank and acknowledge the work of the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek. Without his feedback and without him speaking to the grandparents primarily of Hamilton, we would not have been made aware of this issue, so I thank him for that work on behalf of his constituents.

Minister, you continue to use the word "clarify"—"I have clarified the rules." The reality is, your clarification

has led to people who previously were receiving temporary care assistance no longer getting the money. You call it a clarification; I say you've changed the rules.

I'd like to quote from some of the newspaper headlines on this issue, because, as I say, we've been dealing with it a number of days at question period:

"Province Ramps Up Financial Pressure on Grandparents Raising Grandkids," and that's from the Community Press in Belleville. "Grandparent Ruling Wrong," Hamilton Spectator. "Spite Behind Cuts for Grandparents with Temporary Custody of Kids," Canadian Press. "Cuts to Temporary Child Care Funding 'Disgusting,'" Toronto Star. "NDP Blames Spite for Funding Cuts to Grandparents," CTV News. "Ontario Program Cutbacks a 'Blatant Attack' on the Elderly," Toronto Star.

And this from the Toronto Sun: "Harris was More Generous to Elders." That's a direct quote from Susan Eng, the vice-president of CARP. She goes on to say, "There's no way to make sense of this. They're losing their minds. They have no idea what they're doing here."

Temporary care assistance, in the words of Gail, a grandparent raising a child: If it were not for grandparents or other family members, these children would end up being just another statistic, placed into a system that is so overwhelmed, they would eventually fall through the cracks, become a writeoff or separated from their siblings.

"We take the initiative and the responsibility to ensure a safe and loving environment complete with family bonds. We assume the encumbrance without ever looking back because we love them, we want to ensure their right to a full and well-balanced life.

"We experience our own challenges when parenting again. Social isolation, financial strain or even health issues. Being placed in a parenting role again always brings changes to employment, living arrangements, social networks, lifestyle adjustments ... to name a few."

Ontario Works provided temporary financial help to these caregivers, but Minister Meilleur's statement or clarification in July removed that ability. It is beyond comprehension to me how you could justify from a social standpoint, from a fiscal standpoint, from a personal standpoint, how \$200 a month is going to assist your ministry in—what? Making ends meet? And yet in fact all you're doing is pushing those pressures on to other ministries, other care agencies across the province at, quite frankly, a much higher rate.

If those children are given up by the grandparents to once again go into the system, foster parenting, if you find a foster family who is available and willing to take on the child, it is going to cost you much more per month than the \$200 that you were providing for temporary care assistance.

More importantly, let's look at the relationship that happens when that child is in a kin family. They are going to thrive, they are going to do better in a kin situation than any other government-controlled situation, whether it be fostering or group homes.

While I will acknowledge that the changes to temporary care assistance so far have been hitting certain

pockets of Ontario, most notably, of course, Hamilton, as well as Ottawa, obviously those who continue to care for their grandchildren across Ontario are concerned. They are concerned that once this directive has been signed off and approved across Ontario, once, quite frankly, you get away with it in Hamilton and Ottawa, it is going to sweep Ontario, and every grandparent who is looking after their grandchildren will be removed from temporary care assistance.

I spoke briefly about foster care as another alternative. In my community, there were two new foster families found in the last year. In another community to the south, there were four foster families, in total, found in one year. Clearly, there are not enough foster families available in Ontario to cover the hundreds of children who would need fostering if you removed temporary care assistance from all over Ontario.

I talked briefly about how grandparents provide a stable and nurturing environment for their grandchildren. I can't believe that there's anyone in this House who would believe that the alternative of putting children into institutional care would be an improvement if the grandparents are available and willing to assist.

I want people to remember: We are not talking about thousands of dollars per month. It is \$200 a month—\$231, to be precise—for temporary care assistance. You're balancing that against a policy, quite frankly, that is incomprehensible. I would love to hear the minister talk about why she chose to clarify the directive. What possibly could be the background, the reasoning, behind that clarification? It couldn't be fiscal. It couldn't be because it's better for the child. I would have loved for the minister to have spent her time speaking in the House today to explain to the parents and to the opposition why that directive had to change on Canada Day. Happy Canada Day for the grandparents who were removed from temporary care assistance.

I could go on, but I think the point has been made that you need to look at the child; you need to look at everything as a whole. You've bounced the children from one ministry to the other. You haven't solved a problem; in fact, you've made it worse. I would love to hear your justification for why you needed to do it.

On that point, I will let the debate continue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to thank my colleague the member from Dufferin—Caledon for those kind words.

I'll start off by just going through a chronological order of the events that have transpired in the last few weeks in this House. The minister said, on June 9, "This temporary care assistance is short-term. It says so; it's temporary care assistance." Then, on October 20, she said, "Our government supports the grandparents through this temporary care assistance when the grandparents and children are in need in the short term." Does this sound familiar? It should. These are the comments made by the Minister of Community and Social Services in response to my questions about her changes to temporary care

assistance eligibility. Note the new emphasis by the minister on the term "short term."

"There is no time limit to the program," Madame Meilleur said on November 3. True, but in the new directives it states that although there are no time limits set, cases must be temporary. The old directive stated that there are no time limits, mentioning nothing about them being short-term. In fact, recipients have had this funding for years, and the policy agreed with that.

We must remember that these situations are still temporary because the parents of these grandchildren can always go to court and reverse any custody order, regaining custody of their children. The custodial relationship between the grandchildren and grandparents is always temporary.

On October 16, the minister said that if grandparents are in financial difficulty, these grandparents are like anyone else in Ontario who is in financial difficulty; they are entitled to Ontario Works: welfare. I'd like the minister to look in this gallery and say that directly to Erlene Weaver, who is raising her three grandchildren. Erlene, who is co-chair of ROCK, Raising Our Children's Kids, was one of those grandparents who met with the minister last June, pleading for the same eligibility treatment for grandparents in Hamilton and Ottawa as in the rest of this province.

1700

Erlene would tell the minister that she does not qualify for welfare. She and her husband have a pension income and own a house, which is now mortgaged for her grandchildren. Erlene even applied for ODSP for one grandchild, but he was not disabled enough and got \$29 a month without any benefits.

On October 22: "If grandparents have, for example, two of their grandchildren, they can receive up to \$1,000 a month." Well, that's interesting. I'd like to ask the minister to bring to this Legislature real cases of grandparents raising two grandchildren who have qualified for \$1,000 a month under any provincial program. Perhaps the minister would be willing to send these to me in writing, with the application forms, so that I can get the information to these grandparents so they can reapply. Is this one of those phantom "large range of programs" that the minister alludes to but for which no one qualifies?

On November 3, the minister said: "This government is supporting grandparents by providing temporary care assistance and a host of other programs in the long term."

Madame Meilleur's letter to the editor, October 31: "While temporary care assistance is a short-term program, if a grandparent assumes permanent custody, they may qualify for longer-term support such as the Ontario child benefit."

On November 4, the minister said: "There are other programs that are available to them, like the Ontario child benefit, for instance, and the national child tax credit."

I'd like to ask the minister to tell this Legislature how anyone can think that the Ontario child benefit program, which gives \$50 a month, is support for raising a grand-

child without any other program funding. Perhaps this minister would like to try it herself.

This morning, I asked the minister what other programs in Ontario are offered to grandparents raising grandchildren. Guess what? Her only answer was the Ontario child benefit program. She did mention the national child tax credit, but neglected to mention that it gets clawed back.

According to the minister's new op-ed in today's Hamilton Spectator, even as late as today, she said, "Our government offers a large range of programs to support our most vulnerable children." But this morning, she could only name one Ontario program.

Perhaps the minister would like to suggest to other grandparents the same solution that her staff offered to Betty Cornelius: to send her grandchildren back to their parents. But Betty couldn't decide whether it would be the drug addict or the prostitute.

On October 16, the minister said: "So there was no directive change. There was no rule change."

On October 20: "Let me say that the rules were not changed."

In the Toronto Sun, on October 29: "It's not a change to the rules but a change to the definition of the rules that has cut off hundreds of recipients from temporary care assistance benefits," said Meilleur.

Again in the Sun, on October 29: "Outside the Legislature, the minister acknowledged the ministry had issued a new policy in July that changed who can qualify for the monthly benefits.... The specification of what 'temporary' means has changed. The rule has not changed."

"It is important to note that eligibility rules for TCA have not changed. As part of the ministry's update of all Ontario Works policy directives, the guidelines for TCA have been updated to better support local Ontario Works offices in making decisions regarding eligibility"—the ministry's standard e-mail response, from November 3.

"The definition has not been changed"—the Legislature, on November 4.

So going from October 16, when the minister said there was no rule change, to October 29, when she finally admitted that the specification had changed, we find a path of weaving and bobbing and avoidance of the real issues.

The real issue is that this minister made an enormous mistake by deciding to be punitive to grandparents raising their grandchildren, making their lives as miserable as possible.

She also decided to try to blame her actions on everyone else but herself, including me, for sticking up for my grandparents. Unbelievable. I'm sticking up for my constituents, and this minister calls me a name. Unbelievable.

It's time that the minister took responsibility for this fiasco and fixed her redefinition that cut off these grandchildren from temporary care assistance. Let's be very clear: Temporary care assistance is available to the grandchildren based on the grandchild's income. One

would then think that this money would be for recreation, education and health programs.

"The member of the third party is a very strong supporter and defender of these grandparents," the minister said on September 24. Then she said, "After this member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek blew the whistle on the grandparents, now he's out here telling us that he ... wants to put a time limit on the program." The minister said that on November 3. Unbelievable.

This statement of the minister is one of her most callous. She knows very well that in response to the request from grandparents in my community, my staff arranged a meeting with this very minister. At that meeting, grandparents, members from ROCK, asked the minister to fix the problem of varying interpretations of her directive. In Hamilton and Ottawa, the directive was read so that they were not eligible for TCA. Throughout the rest of the province—and my staff has checked with many municipalities—the directive was read so that it would include our grandchildren.

In a meeting with the minister in April, Sandra Schoenfeldt, Grand-Parenting Again Canada, Niagara, reports that the minister said, "The assistance is there because of the children's inability to earn monies to support themselves for as long as they need it." Well, what happened, Minister, between April and June? Why did you make this change?

Then she said, "This member would like to have the program income-tested." She said that on October 23. "We have this program for these grandparents, but he continues to argue that it should be income-tested. He doesn't use the word, but all the examples that he's giving me"—on October 29. Totally false. Totally untrue. Speculative.

For this completely erroneous statement, I expect a written apology from the minister to these ROCK grandparents, who came in good faith to meet with her in June. The minister is the only one to even think about income or means testing. She's trying a diversion from her attack on these grandchildren by falsely accusing the motive of these grandparents who met with her in June. It's not me who's under attack but grandchildren being raised by their grandparents.

The presence of these grandparents in this Legislature today, some from as far away as three hours north of Ottawa—Erlene, Betty, Sandra, Diane, Bernadette—all of whom are members of organizations fighting for the rights of their grandchildren, is proof to everyone here of the seriousness of this action by Minister Meilleur. They all know the truth, and they all want this minister to fix the mess she has created.

Finally, I must say, I personally have been through the ringer on this with this minister. She continues to send out ads to the papers misleading the people of this province—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would ask the member to withdraw that unparliamentary remark.

Mr. Paul Miller: What am I withdrawing, Mr. Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would ask the member to withdraw that unparliamentary remark.

Mr. Paul Miller: I withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you.

Mr. Paul Miller: But that's what's happening, and I'll tell you right now, you can twist it, you can turn it, you can turn it upside down, Minister, but we're not going to let up. These grandparents aren't going to let up until you reverse this callous, disgusting decision that you've made on behalf of the McGuinty government. You should hang your head in shame.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I am pleased to join the debate today to discuss temporary care assistance, an issue which has been circulated widely in the media for the last couple of weeks, and also to debate the motion brought by the third party about the caregivers, such as grandparent and other custodians, doing their best to provide stability for children placed in their care due to often unforeseen and unfortunate circumstances.

1710

It's important to talk about this issue and to outline the importance of this issue. Before I start, I want to thank all the grandparents and all the caregivers who have come to this place today to be with us, to listen to this debate. Everyone, I believe, who has listened to us this afternoon listened to the honourable member the Minister of Community and Social Services outlining the intent and the goals and the decisions and regulations in the province of Ontario. She outlined this very clearly: The rule has never been changed. Despite what the opposition says, the rule never changed. I believe that when a minister of the crown stands up in her place and says, "The rule has not changed," it has not changed, because she is talking about it from a responsible position. And it's important to outline—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I have to ask, again, the member for Hamilton East to withdraw that unparliamentary remark.

Mr. Paul Miller: I withdraw the word "misleading."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): You have to withdraw.

Mr. Paul Miller: I withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you. I return to the member for London—Fanshawe.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I understand the emotion about this issue.

I know the member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek brought this issue to our attention many different times and he asked the minister many different times about the position of the government, our ministry, in this regard. Every single time, I believe she said clearly to him and to all the people across the province that the rule has not changed. We said it and she said it. I believe strongly that when a minister of the crown stands up in her place and says the rule has not been changed, it has not been changed.

We're talking about temporary care—

Interjections.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I believe that when the honourable member from Hamilton spoke I listened to him. I respected his position, and I hope he listens to us and to our position on this matter.

I care a lot about the people who work very hard to care for their loved ones, whether they're grandparents, friends or family members, who have made a huge decision to look after a child.

We have said it many different times: The support does not go to the grandparents or the adult; it goes to the child, and if the child is eligible, then they get the support. The rule has not been changed. We repeat it again in this place.

I know the opposition and the third party have been talking on many different occasions and, sadly, have dragged in people from many places to come to this place to use them as a political token to their advantage. It's a shame to bring people who have been working hard and giving their best to support—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would ask all members of this House to observe the standards of decorum that we would all hope to observe. I return to the member for London—Fanshawe.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: As I mentioned, those honourable people are doing what they're doing because they love what they do, because they want to work very hard, they want to provide care and support and stability for those children who for some reason lost the support from their biological parents.

It's important to talk about this issue and not to bring it to the political arena, and it's important not to bring families from across the province to this very place and use them as a political token to advance a certain party.

I believe strongly that our obligation and duty as a government, as a ministry, is to support all the children across the province of Ontario, to support the people who are giving care to those children and, as I mentioned and as the minister mentioned, we can work to continue the support.

As you know, I listened to the member opposite many different times, and we went to the ministry and we spoke to the people who are in charge of that portfolio. What they said to us is that the rule has not changed and is not going to be changed. I know the program has been implemented since 1998, and all the people have been eligible since 1998 until now and till today and will be tomorrow—it will be the same, no changes.

As you know, most of the administrators in the municipalities across the province of Ontario have some flexibility to determine who is eligible and who is not eligible. I know that the social worker or the person who's looking after a certain family sometimes makes a mistake in trying to do their best to assess and make that person eligible. That's why our offices across the province are open to all the families, all the caregivers. If they have some kind of confusion or if they have some kind of problem, our offices will be open for them, to work with

them with local administrations in order to clarify those issues and help them if they need support or for some reason they are not eligible to get any support for their loved ones or for the people they care for.

It's important to continue to talk about this issue because this is an issue we care a lot about. That's why our government, since we got elected in 2003, has paid a lot of attention to those issues. Also, I recognize my colleague the member from Niagara Falls, Mr. Craitor, who brought to this place many different initiatives, especially about grandparents' right to support their grandchildren. He worked very hard over his time in order to support grandparents in the province of Ontario. Also, I remember that Minister Mary Anne Chambers worked very hard to establish kinship relations and laws in the province of Ontario to allow grandparents to take care of their grandchildren. I also want to recognize the minister, Madeleine Meilleur, who has been working very hard since she became the Minister of Community and Social Services to make sure everyone in the province of Ontario is looked after. I know the members opposite sometimes try to twist the information or send it a different way—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would have to caution the member for London—Fanshawe in terms of his use of parliamentary language.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I withdraw if I said anything wrong, Mr. Speaker. It's very important, when we talk about this important issue, not to involve the families, not to involve the mothers and fathers, not to involve those people. Let's deal with it in a professional manner. Let's work together, all of us in this House, to find a solution to fit and to protect those children. It's important—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I ask the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek to please come to order, and return to the member for London—Fanshawe to conclude his remarks.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: It's important to work with the families and work with caregivers across the province of Ontario and continue to give them the support they need in order to continue to care for the children who are in their custody for temporary reasons.

We cannot continue our job and we cannot continue our mission without clarifying the positions, the rules and regulations in the province of Ontario. As the minister mentioned, no rules are being changed; it's just that the rules are being clarified. Whenever we can, we work together with grandparents and caregivers across the province of Ontario to make sure those children in their custody will be supported.

Mr. Speaker, I know many people from our caucus want to speak on this issue, and thank you for allowing me to say this. I would vote on this motion, but I'll tell you why. The language being used in this motion is not correct. That's why I'm not voting for it, because this motion is not about the rules being changed. The rules are not being changed; the rules remain the same, with no changes. That's why I'm not voting for the motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I'm pleased to rise today in support of the motion put forward by the NDP caucus. The member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek was absolutely right to challenge the Minister of Community and Social Services on her revisions to the rules regarding grandparents across this province who are making the best of a very difficult situation. They find themselves in a situation of temporary care assistance of their grandchildren. Unfortunately, there's no definition of what "temporary" really is. The initiative may have been well meaning, but it was not well thought out. The impact was not tested.

These grandparents were looking forward to their golden years. They worked hard. They raised their own children, paid their taxes, and now, because of love, a sense of family, a sense of nurturing and a sense of responsibility, they suddenly find themselves as primary caregivers.

It is estimated that it costs about \$300,000 to raise a child to adulthood. Many of these grandparents are on fixed incomes, and here they are in their advanced years having to take on part-time jobs to make ends meet just to make sure that their grandchildren have the best that they can give them. Telling these folks who have contributed their entire lives to building our communities, investing in our province and paying their taxes that they will not receive any support for providing a stable, safe home for their grandchildren, who would otherwise be in the system, is reprehensible.

1720

Over the past few years, I have seen an increase in advertisements and campaigns to encourage more foster parents, as there is a significant shortfall in our province for foster parents. If these dedicated, loving grandparents had not stepped in, these children would be in foster care, or a group home on a waiting list for foster care. In essence, these guardians are saving the province a significant sum of money in administrative cost and, more importantly, in future systemic issues. I simply don't understand the regressive thinking of this McGuinty government. These grandparents are providing a sense of stability, a sense of continuity and love at a time when these children feel abandoned and left behind. As a grandmother myself, I know how instinctive it is to reach out and help your grandchild. That's what family does.

I worked with Madame Meilleur in my previous life as a municipal representative and I admire the way in which she does her work. The minister did stand in her place and praise these grandparents for their contribution. But in my experience with the minister in her previous role as Minister of Culture, I'm finding it very bewildering that she is agreeing to changes that are cutting off a few dollars from grandparents—a few dollars that make a difference between having the necessities in life or perhaps the opportunity to be participating in a hockey team or take piano lessons or maybe be in a soccer club.

The loophole we are working with here is the issue of sole guardianship or custody. Many of the parents have not relinquished their rights or they simply can't be found to get them to sign that piece of paper. In some cases, the

grandparents don't want to force their own children to relinquish their rights. They may be holding out hope that their children will get themselves sorted out and become the parents that these vulnerable children deserve. It may be a long shot, but perhaps hope is all they have left. Why should we take that away from them?

Is the Minister of Community and Social Services really advocating for parents to sign over their rights to their children so that the grandparents can get the supports that they need to raise these kids? Have these kids and grandparents become a technicality?

My NDP colleague went to the minister in the spirit of co-operation back in June to share his concerns and the concerns of the grandparents in his municipality and across Ontario. This is what the taxpayers of our province expect. They expect us to park our politics at the door and do what's good for the broader public. After the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek left the minister's office, you would think the loophole would be corrected. But no, what the minister and her staff did was to immediately throw the ball into the municipal court, thereby giving licence to municipalities to cut off grandparents, who should be included in the existing legislation but were on the cusp, due to a technicality. Perhaps she thought that no one would hold her accountable for refusing to support these grandparents. Whatever the reason, it just isn't good enough.

The minister rewrote the rules, giving all municipalities that open door to deny grandparents financial support. Adding insult to injury, the minister suggested affected grandparents could apply for OW. OW is welfare. Go on welfare to look after your grandchildren? Is this the advice coming from the McGuinty government? These are proud, taxpaying citizens who have chosen to accept this additional responsibility, which in their whole life they never dreamed they would have: to look after their children in a time of need. They're not looking for assistance to help them pay for a trip to Florida. They need to buy clothes, they need to increase their food budget, they need to buy school supplies, and hopefully maybe pay for a swimming lesson or a piano lesson. They are asking for our support to give these kids a decent quality of life, something that would be considered a normal quality of life. Kids who have no one but their grandparents in their corner need our help right now to make a real difference in their lives. It must be noted that by asking grandparents to assume welfare status, this puts the kids on welfare too, and I thought we were working so hard to get them off welfare.

The McGuinty government continually misses that human aspect of the work we do here because, after initiating a plan, they don't think through how it will look when it actually hits the ground and affects the person that that well-meaning plan was put in place for.

I'm sure all of us got into politics to do the best we could for the people we represent, to really make a difference in our communities and our province. The minister could, if she wanted to and if she evaluated that impact I'm talking about, that impacts these people

directly once that initiative is signed off, change the lives of thousands of children with just the flash of a pen in a cabinet meeting on a Wednesday afternoon. It really is that easy. One order in council is all it takes; five minutes on a Wednesday afternoon. But unfortunately, the chosen path has been the easy way out, a way that passes the buck to the municipalities, and that way we can lay blame on somebody else. I say, "Shame."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Il me fait plaisir d'ajouter mon appui à mon collègue le député de Hamilton Est-Stoney Creek. Il a rencontré la ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires en juin cette année avec des grands-parents qui avaient de la difficulté : ils se faisaient couper leur prime d'assistance pour s'occuper de leurs petits-enfants. La ministre et son personnel étaient bien déçus de ce qui leur arrivait et elle a promis de s'en mêler. Eh bien, la ministre s'en est mêlée : elle a émis des clarifications qui font en sorte que maintenant personne n'est éligible pour avoir la prime, peu importe la situation. Ils sont tous traités de la même façon : personne n'en a reçu.

Aujourd'hui, l'assemblée est pleine de grands-parents, des grands-parents pour qui la prime a été coupée. La ministre essaie de nous faire croire qu'il n'y a pas eu de changement. Mais s'il n'y a pas eu de changement, comment est-ce qu'elle explique que les galeries sont pleines de grands-parents qui recevaient la prime avant et qui ne la reçoivent plus maintenant? Quelque chose a changé. Elle doit l'avouer et elle ne le fait pas.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Further debate?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I really am pleased to have an opportunity to speak to this debate. I had the privilege of acting as Minister of Community and Social Services for the first couple of years, when the McGuinty government first became government, and this particular issue is important because it is part of a very large conversation that our government has had with the public of Ontario around support for people who need help.

I want to start, like every member of this House has, by saying that, yes, I'm glad that grandparents are in this House. I'm glad that grandparents made the trip to be here to listen to debate about things that matter to children. It's the thing that we've been doing since 2003. It's a little bit unfair to impugn motive across party lines, because over the years many of us haven't been here that long. But in the time that I've been here, we've sat in various seats in this House, and what I do know about every member who gets elected here is that everybody has the view to do the best that they can, and it is unfair to say that some people care more than other people care, because that's not the case.

Can I start with that, please? I sat in opposition right about where this member is sitting. That's where I started in 1995, and over here, in this seat right here, was Mike Harris and then Ernie Eves. What they did in 1995 was cut social assistance generally, including all the programs

that we're talking about today. So you have to understand the irony: that I stand in the House today to defend the Minister of Community and Social Services after the kind of work we've been building in community and social services since we became a government. Many of the parents and grandparents that I met over the years as the minister, when we started initiating increases to social services for the first time in 13 years—these grandparents know what our history is.

What I appreciate is that you're here today because you're still fighting the fight for kids and for your grandchildren, and that's important. What I want to talk about today is a little bit of the irony, because the same members who stand in the House that asked you to come and be part of this political debate are the same—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It would probably be helpful if you made your remarks through the Chair, as per the rules of the House.

I return to the minister.

1730

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I'm okay with this because I too have been in opposition and have felt the need to resort to heckling when you lose facts in a debate, because there are facts here that need to be told, and I want the Hansard to reflect the facts: The opposition members who are in the House today were the government when a fundamental principle was at work, when these same members—members of the Conservative Party, the NDP and Liberals—since the 1970s, since the beginnings of social services to help people in need, started with one fundamental principle that was the same in the 1970s as it is today, and that is that families help families. It doesn't matter what party has ever been in government, that has been the underlying principle.

I just need a moment. As I said earlier, I've been there, I get where you're coming from, but you have to understand that since the 1970s what has driven social policy across every single party that has been in government in this House is that families support families. If we lose that principle, we lose everything in society. If we can't have an expectation that parents take care of their children, and when that falls down, that their family will step up to the plate because our society needs them to—that's what's fundamental behind every single party that has been the government in this House since the 1970s. We have to start there. Every single party has been the government with that same principle that is still a fact today.

We move forward and say, "Well, there was a political party here when I was elected that cut all programs and social assistance," and the grandparents who were taking care of grandchildren have suffered the fate of that, and yet these Conservative members today are standing up, reporting all of a sudden that they care more, but they were the same ones who made the cuts to the same programs. Please don't come in today as if, "I have clean hands here," because you've got to be consistent in your principles. You cut the programs when you were the government.

When we came into this office in 2003 and we raised the levels across the board, these are two political parties

that voted against every single increase. How do you stand in the House today and say, "I care more. I care more than you care"? We raised the levels of support across the board and two political parties voted against us repeatedly, and that is just a fact. Those are the facts on record in Hansard. How do you stand up and say you care for kids, when we created 22,000 extra child care spaces that you voted against? How do you stand in the House and vote against measures with direct, significant impact on kids, and you vote against them, but today, because it's a political opportunity, you're going to impugn motive on the same government that made these increases to every single social service program that the government has had on offer since 2003? That's the reality.

I want to speak for a moment about temporary care assistance specifically, because we know this is a program of temporary care assistance. Much has been said about the fact of, "Where's the rest of the support?" Let's take an example of a grandparent who did not expect, when they got to a pension age, that all of a sudden they were going to remain with the care of their grandchildren. What opportunities are there for these people to get support from the government? What are they? I have to tell you that these same people, if they're now on OAS, if they're on old age security, are entitled to get the Ontario child benefit.

Mr. Paul Miller: Fifty bucks a month.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: That is a new program which is growing every year. I have to tell the opposition member, you cannot have opposed the Ontario child benefit program when it is direct assistance—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would ask the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek to please come to order. Once again, I would ask the member for Timmins—James Bay to please come to order.

I return to the minister to conclude her remarks.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: The point is that if there are grandparents who are on old age security, there are other supports here. Yes, they are income tested. There are other supports. They have been listed and they are going to have to be believed, because this is a party that has supported—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I am pleased to be able to join in today's debate and certainly will be supporting the motion that we have before us.

But I want to take the members and observers here back to the passage of Bill 210, the Child and Family Services Statute Law Amendment Act. I have a reason for doing that, and that is simply the fact that throughout the bill, it was very clear what the government's objectives were in terms of broadening the definition of a "place of safety." This was to allow children to be placed with family. It was referred to as "kinship care." It was very clear that the intent was based on the research and, frankly, the intuition and the natural connections that

other family members have. Several of the speakers today have talked about the problems that grandparents find their own children in, and then they want to be able to rescue those grandchildren from certain circumstances.

I think it's important that we see today's issue in the context of that bill that was passed. And in response to the Minister of International Trade and Investment, I would just want to underline that we supported that bill. We want to make it clear that we did because we understood the kinds of important legislative objectives that were going to be in this bill.

It seems strange that, at this particular point in time, having had that bill before us and having supported it, we're looking at today's reality—and today's reality is certainly something quite different. I know that I, as well as other members of this House, have looked at the shortfall on things like the child benefit program, which this government introduced when it became clear that the families were going to lose the back-to-school and winter clothing allowance for children and instead were going to have about three months of \$50—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would ask the Minister of International Trade and Investment to please come to order.

I return to the member for York—Simcoe.

Mrs. Julia Munro: So we see indications, then, over the last few months of obviously a change of heart, if you like, of the way in which this government began with the whole notion of kinship care and the support for that, which, as other members have said, was something that—in this particular instance, the monies for grandparents have in fact been around for 10 years.

But the kinds of issues that we see emerging in the last few months are, frankly, attacks on the principles that this government placed before us in the legislation, when we look at the question of things like the winter clothing allowance. I found it very interesting in the minister's comments earlier today when she talked about the temporary program creating stability. I thought there was a bit of in internal contradiction between referring to something that was temporary and providing stability.

The other thing that others have mentioned, and that I think is really important to stress, is the fact that by creating a situation where individuals find themselves no longer eligible, you not only eliminate that kind of stability, regardless of how the minister defines it, but you also look at the fact that if people are forced through this to look at their children going into foster care, this of course is at least three times more expensive than the current program that has been under threat. But I think what we're looking at here is the fact that today it is very clear that there are some very serious challenges, and obviously the technicalities that the minister has raised, frankly, do not answer the question for those people who have taken on the responsibility and found themselves ineligible.

1740

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: This is quite an extraordinary debate. First, I want to thank my colleagues Mr. Miller and Howard Hampton for their presentations.

I want to say that the performance from the Minister of Community and Social Services was an extraordinary performance today, essentially saying there was no problem. When I look in the galleries here, when I look at these people who have come with their grandchildren, with the families they're responsible for, I don't believe that everything is taken care of, I don't believe that everything is fine. There is clear evidence in this hall today that your government has abandoned these grandparents and these children.

I listened to the minister of economic development, Sandra Pupatello—

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: It's international trade.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: International trade and travel. I listened to the minister go after the Conservative Party, the opposition. She seems to forget that right now she's in government and she has the power to act. You can spend all your speaking time attacking that government or you can take action now. You, Minister, prefer to do nothing and yak and yak about the opposition. The simple reality, Minister and members of that government, is that your approach—

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: You were the government and you made cuts to those programs.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'd ask the minister again to observe the rules of the House and refrain from heckling the member.

I return to the member for Toronto—Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker.

Your approach is wrong morally, it's wrong in human terms, it's wrong in policy terms. Morally, these grandparents and these children should not be abandoned. It's wrong in policy terms because if you want to make sure that children are taken care of, if you want to make sure that families are kept together, then give them the very modest assistance that was available until an under-the-counter cut came along and took the money out of those households.

Your government cannot defend that policy to parents across this province. You go to any meeting of parents, talk to them, they'll tell you they don't want you to behave like that. Rescind your policy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett: It really is unfortunate that we have to even debate this motion before the Legislature today, and it's unfortunate that we have to even consider why this government would pull the rug out from under the very people who provide the kind of guidance and support for younger generations that's so important in our society, and I'm obviously speaking of Ontario's grandparents. This government has provided a back-handed slap that has taken essential funding from those who give of themselves to look after their beloved grandchildren.

The member from Dufferin—Caledon reminded me, and we all know this situation, that today's US presi-

dential candidate Barack Obama was raised for a number of years by his grandmother. We can all think of people in our home ridings. I think of a couple who became very good friends with my daughter and what they had to put forward, what they had to sacrifice to look after two young girls, their grandchildren. It pretty well eliminates any thought of retirement. You essentially go back to work and you pretty well, I think in the one case, work until the end of your days to support your grandchildren.

Specifically, as we've heard, we're talking about those grandparents who go above and beyond, stepping up to the plate when their grandchildren, through no fault of their own, are placed in unfortunate circumstances or, at best, unforeseen circumstances. It's clear that the grandparents deserve our support, and I'm not talking about merely supportive words. There's little doubt, as they enter their senior years, they're tasked with covering child rearing costs from already tight retirement budgets. Grandparents in this situation in our society do need a hand up; they need a hand up from this government to ensure that not only their needs but the needs of their grandchildren are being met as well. It's so concerning when we hear that Mr. McGuinty and the Minister of Community and Social Services have ensured that the only program available to them—again it's a Ministry of Community and Social Services program—the Ontario Works program, that's known as the temporary care assistance provision, has been taken away from them, pulling something like \$200 a month from their pockets.

In the debate this afternoon, we're speaking probably on behalf of thousands and thousands of grandchildren who have received this kind of upbringing. I want to remind the government members opposite that many children are with their grandparents in the first place because their parents have had to deal with perhaps health problems, psychiatric problems, problems with the use or overuse of addictive substances. Many grandparents themselves are perhaps working poor on fixed incomes. They need help. They need help to pay for the costs of raising a child: medication, school activity expenses, sports equipment, oftentimes clothing.

It's very clear that we all realize in this House that we have government for a reason: to step up in those particular circumstances where it is very much required. Yet this government has taken away that small stipend that would aid in meeting some of the costs to ensure that grandchildren are raised amongst kin in a more stable environment.

I have pointed out that most of the grandparents who have answered the call to help keep their families from falling apart, if you will, have moved past their gainful employment days, and they're often knee-deep in retirement budgets. Some have had to remortgage their homes, cash out their RSPs, to cover the cost of raising children. They really didn't anticipate having to shoulder these kinds of costs.

The least that government could do is extend a helping hand to ensure that these laudable grandparents, people who have my admiration, the admiration of certainly

many people in my community, just to ensure that these kinds of families don't fall through the cracks. I think it's very important for everyone here to just remember that the people who do this job are revered in their community, they're embraced by their community, and this government could do no less.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time that we have available for this debate. Mr. Hampton has moved opposition day motion number 4. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1749 to 1759.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be counted by the table.

Ayes

Bailey, Robert
Barrett, Toby
Bisson, Gilles
DiNovo, Cheri
Dunlop, Garfield
Gélinas, France
Hampton, Howard
Hardeman, Ernie

Hillier, Randy
Horwath, Andrea
Hudak, Tim
Jones, Sylvia
Kormos, Peter
Miller, Norm
Miller, Paul
Munro, Julia

Prue, Michael
Savoline, Joyce
Scott, Laurie
Sterling, Norman W.
Tabuns, Peter
Wilson, Jim

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): All those opposed to the motion will please rise one at a time and be counted by the table.

Nays

Albanese, Laura
Arthurs, Wayne
Balkissoon, Bas
Bartolucci, Rick
Bentley, Christopher
Best, Margaret
Brown, Michael A.
Cansfield, Donna H.
Caplan, David
Carroll, Aileen
Crozier, Bruce
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe
Dombrowsky, Leona
Duguid, Brad
Duncan, Dwight
Flynn, Kevin Daniel

Fonseca, Peter
Gerretsen, John
Gravelle, Michael
Hoy, Pat
Jaczek, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Kular, Kuldeep
Lalonde, Jean-Marc
Levac, Dave
Mangat, Amrit
Matthews, Deborah
Mauro, Bill
McMeekin, Ted
Meilleur, Madeleine
Mitchell, Carol
Moridi, Reza
Naqvi, Yasir
Oraziotti, David

Pendergast, Leeanna
Phillips, Gerry
Pupatello, Sandra
Qadri, Shafiq
Ramal, Khalil
Rinaldi, Lou
Sandals, Liz
Sergio, Mario
Smith, Monique
Smitherman, George
Takhar, Harinder S.
Van Bommel, Maria
Watson, Jim
Wilkinson, John
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 22; the nays are 52.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negated.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm obliged to inform the House that the member for Timmins-James Bay has withdrawn his request for an adjournment debate scheduled for today.

It being past 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1802.

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Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development / Ministre du Développement économique
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
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DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
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Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora—Rainy River	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
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Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West—Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest—Glanbrook	
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges—Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (LIB)	Brampton—Springdale	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (NDP)	Welland	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Kular, Kuldip (LIB)	Bramalea—Gore—Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
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Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean—Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga—Brampton South / Mississauga—Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity—Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
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Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
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Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
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Moridi, Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	
Munro, Julia (PC)	York—Simcoe	
Murdoch, Bill (IND)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	
Naqvi, Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	

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Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Monique M. (LIB)	Nipissing	Minister of Tourism / Ministre du Tourisme
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Sousa, Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Energy and Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Énergie et de l'Infrastructure
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton—Mississippi Mills	
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
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Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (LIB)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Wilkinson, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Perth—Wellington	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
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Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Zimmer, David (LIB)	Willowdale	

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Gilles Bisson, Kim Craitor
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Tim Hudak, Amrit Mangat
Phil McNeely, John O'Toole
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Wayne Arthurs, Toby Barrett
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**Assemblée législative
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**Official Report
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**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**



Wednesday 5 November 2008

Mercredi 5 novembre 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 5 November 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 5 novembre 2008

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the non-denominational prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PHOTO CARD ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LES CARTES-PHOTO

Mr. Bradley moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 85, An Act to permit the issuance of photo cards to residents of Ontario and to make complementary amendments to the Highway Traffic Act / Projet de loi 85, Loi permettant la délivrance de cartes-photo aux résidents de l'Ontario et apportant des modifications complémentaires au Code de la route.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Debate?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Mr. Speaker, I'll be sharing my time with the member for Algoma-Manitoulin, my parliamentary assistant, Michael Brown, who is with us today.

I rise in the House today to begin third reading debate on legislation that, if passed, would support Ontario's economy while improving access and opportunity for every Ontarian. I will share this time with my parliamentary assistant for transportation, Mike Brown, who will continue debate on this legislation.

Our proposed legislation, the Photo Card Act, would provide Ontarians with an affordable, convenient and secure passport alternative for use at all Canada-US land and sea border crossings. To ensure the integrity and security of these cards, we would implement safe and secure technology features to protect the privacy of information. To offer equal opportunity to all, we are proposing a completely new card, a photo identification card for Ontarians who do not drive. To give people who don't drive but want an alternative to a passport, we will make an enhanced version of that card as well.

I'm sure many of our members are aware that the western hemisphere travel initiative is now almost completely phased in. On June 1, 2009, the US government is scheduled to require all visitors to prove their citizenship using a passport or an accepted passport alternative. That is why our government has proposed that a new security-enhanced version of the existing Ontario driver's licence be that alternative. With just over half of all Canadians

holding a passport, we want to make it as simple as possible for Ontario travellers to have access to a secure border-crossing document. This is an opportunity for Ontario to show leadership in supporting the economy by helping avoid confusion and traffic congestion at the border and by minimizing delays for travellers and commercial drivers.

The enhanced driver's licence card would offer the same privileges as today's licence card, with the addition of information needed to show proof of Canadian citizenship at US land and sea border crossings. Our borders are the economic gateway to this province and must remain safe, open and accessible on June 1, 2009—and every day. Our economy and our prosperity depend on it; the ties of family and friendship that extend across the border do as well. Each day more than 92,000 cars cross our borders with New York, Michigan and Minnesota. More than 22,000 trucks carry \$650 million in goods a day. Over 66% of all Canada's trade by truck with the US passes through Ontario's borders. This all amounts to nearly a third of a trillion dollars in trade each year with the US, Ontario's largest trading partner.

Anyone applying for an enhanced driver's licence will be expected to provide documents that confirm their Canadian citizenship. I want to be clear: Protection of privacy and security of personal information has been and continues to be a consideration of paramount importance throughout the development of this program. As well, obtaining an enhanced driver's licence is entirely voluntary. We have consulted with Ontario's Information and Privacy Commissioner and I've received valuable guidance that will help ensure the proposed cards are developed in a manner that keeps personal information secure.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the commissioner and every organization and individual who took the time to attend and provide their guidance and advice at committee. In fact, the commissioner has noted that she is "very pleased with the co-operation and willing attitude of the Ontario government to work with my office and protect citizens' privacy."

Making sure all these new cards are issued legitimately is critical to combatting fraud and identity theft, and photo comparison technology will help ensure that multiple driver's licences are not issued to the same person under different names. This technology has been implemented successfully in many North American jurisdictions with positive results. For example, Illinois pioneered this technology nearly 10 years ago and has since discovered more than 5,200 cases of identity fraud. In other words, Illinois set up the program we mentioned,

photo comparison technology, and they picked up some 5,200 cases of identity fraud. Photo comparison technology would help stop suspended drivers from improperly obtaining a new driver's licence under a different name.

I can assure you that on the advice of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, the information obtained will be carefully protected. We know that Ontario's driver's licence is among the most commonly used documents for identification purposes. Ontarians are regularly asked to prove their identity for many day-to-day transactions, such as opening a bank account and proving age eligibility for a senior's discount. A photo card for people who do not drive would improve access to everyday services and conveniences for all Ontarians.

Like the enhanced driver's licence, our photo card could, if the applicant wishes, be enhanced for use as a convenient and affordable passport alternative for entering the United States. This program has long been advocated by youth, the blind, people with disabilities and senior communities. By removing barriers to access, we are increasing opportunity for all Ontarians.

Our government is working closely with the Canada Border Services Agency and the US Department of Homeland Security. Ontarians need safe and secure alternatives. Our neighbours, our trading partners and our friends expect us to do our part to make sure people and goods continue to flow safely and efficiently across our borders by the June 2009 deadline, and in the future. This proposed legislation would make this possible.

0910

I wish to say as well, at this point, that what I'm encouraged by, in addition to what we are doing in Ontario, is that corresponding action is taking place in the United States. We all recall that the Department of Homeland Security and the outgoing administration in the United States made a decision, after very traumatic events that happened in New York City and Washington, that they would have to increase security dramatically. As a result, all of us here in Canada—at least, I think, overwhelmingly people in Canada—determined that this would have a detrimental effect on both sides of the border. I recall, and perhaps some other members have had this same experience, discussions with American representatives, whether they be in business or in government or tourist organizations, for instance, and all were alarmed with the thought that the borders would clog up and that people wouldn't be able to make their normal trips across the border, or that there would be long lineups and it would be very difficult.

One of the things we noted, and it's a fact we have to deal with, is that our friends to the south, the people of the United States, tend to obtain passports in lesser numbers, in terms of percentages, than we in Canada do, although the overwhelming majority of people in the province or in a country—in this particular case the countries of Canada and the United States—don't have passports. We were looking for an alternative, and I got into discussions with, and want to congratulate, Louise Slaughter, who was re-elected to the House of Representatives in

the United States. I do that because Louise was one of the real campaigners for a sensible approach to our borders. She was the one who supported delaying implementation of the provisions of the western hemisphere travel initiative until such time as it could be made efficient and more convenient than was contemplated. She is a powerful member of the House of Representatives, a very persuasive member of the House of Representatives, representing what they refer to in the United States as western New York—we probably think of it as northwestern New York. It was people such as Louise Slaughter and many others whom I and some of my colleagues along the border met with, who indicated they were prepared to be co-operative.

This so-called "battle" over the border was not a fight between Americans and Canadians, between Republicans and Democrats or between Liberals, Conservatives and New Democrats. It was really a fight—again, that's too strong a word—between those of us who live relatively close to the border and understand the importance of an easily accessible border, while still being secure, and those who live further away and do not see the ramifications of a severe restriction and tightening on the border. So we had people standing together.

I remember talking on the same day to two different senators, one from Alaska and one from Vermont. These were two individuals who probably didn't agree on 10 things in a year, but one thing they agreed on, because they represented border communities, was the need for delay of implementation of the western hemisphere travel initiative and, second, for some sensible alternatives to what was being proposed. That was true pretty well all along the border.

I note that the state of Washington and British Columbia have collaborated to put together an enhanced-security driver's licence that is an alternative to the passport. We are now seeing that in New York state they have implemented something similar to what we're doing here today. Michigan, Vermont and some other states have expressed an interest in doing this as well, because again there's a recognition that Canadians and Americans like to travel back and forth across our borders for a variety of reasons: for visits with friends and relatives, for tourist purposes, and certainly for commercial, business and industrial travel across those borders. What has encouraged me, I must say, is that in fact we've had that kind of great co-operation between people at the border and our tourist organizations, our chambers of commerce and those in the field of labour who recognize how important the movement of goods across the Canadian-US border happens to be. What we do here is demonstrate to our American friends that we are moving forward with an initiative of this kind—a voluntary alternative that's available for people.

Why is it more convenient, whether it's Americans in New York state or Canadians here in the province of Ontario? It's more convenient because it's a document that most people have in any event: a document we can carry easily in our wallets, a document that far more

people are likely to have than a passport. When I saw that New York state implementing a new program—I think it was on Labour Day—I thought this would be very good, particularly for tourism for those who don't necessarily travel frequently but like to come across the border or for those who do travel frequently and are close to the border. The business traveller and the person who is quite wealthy and travels very often—those people are going to have a passport, without a doubt. Indeed, people are still free to get a passport, and we advocate people getting this kind of identification. But there are many people who simply do not want to get a passport and want that alternative. This legislation provides for that alternative.

I listened with great interest to the debate that took place, first of all in the House and then in committee, and there were excellent presentations. As we know, in committee people are free to express their views, whatever those views might be. They are not always accurate in terms of the information presented, but that does not mean that people are not entitled to make a presentation. I thought some of it was very, very good, and it was all valuable in that we got input from people who had questions to ask about this legislation.

I'm pleased to say that our government has taken most, if not all, bills to committee. I think the value of that is that it does allow representatives of the public to come in and make representations, and allows opposition and government members to ask appropriate questions of the officials who are implementing the program. I have been pleased with the degree of support we've seen in this House. One can never be presumptuous, because you are in contempt of the Legislature if you indicate you know, somehow, that the bill is going to pass. You can prognosticate, and I tend to think from what I've heard in the House that there's some considerable support for the legislation. I want to thank my friends on government benches and the opposition benches for the input they have given to this legislation.

I know that Ms. Scott, the member for Victoria-Haliburton—I still call it that; there are probably some other things in there now in terms of the name—was very interested in this initiative and, I believe, brought forward some private member's legislation, just as my friend my friend from Durham brought forward another piece of private member's legislation that was introduced in the House and will be coming forward for debate, dealing with the hand-held electronic equipment and the banning of that.

Not all the wisdom, as I've said on many occasions, resides on the government side of the House, no matter which party is in power. I think our Legislature works best when we try to look at some of the initiatives that each individual member brings forward, and the suggestions and the debate, and then try to improve our bills and perhaps add to the legislation what we might not have contemplated by having that input from members of the opposition.

I thank all members of the House for bringing it to this point in time. I should note, for some who may have been

members of the Legislature for a while, some who had fathers and mothers who are members of the Legislature—

Interjection.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'll tell you what happened. It used to be—I know the opposition doesn't believe this, and the new members—that third reading almost didn't exist. It was almost on a nod or a very short debate. I just want to say that it used to be that way. I'm not making any suggestions as to what might happen now, but I can tell you that it used to be that way. But I'm always happy to hear from my—

Mr. John Yakubuski: It used to be that they didn't cut off second reading debate.

0920

Hon. James J. Bradley: I must say that I don't want to get into that topic, because do you know what happens when you get into that topic? You start getting very partisan—"The former government did this"—and I don't want to tell the people of Ontario that there's no government in the history of Ontario that used closure and time allocation more than the previous Conservative government. I just don't want to get into that, when my friend from Barry's Bay brings that forward. I don't want to get into that at all.

I'm going to yield the floor shortly to somebody I want to commend. I want to commend the parliamentary assistant in the Ministry of Transportation, Mike Brown, from Algoma-Manitoulin and something else—

Interjection.

Hon. James J. Bradley: It's just Algoma-Manitoulin still? The federal riding is different—for the work he's done—

Mr. John Yakubuski: He's not running federally, is he?

Hon. James J. Bradley: No, he's not running federally, so therefore a seat doesn't open up for somebody who's looking for a seat. I can say that. That hasn't happened. Now, if my friend from Renfrew wants to give up his seat, or my friend from Durham, that would enable something to happen. But I digress, and the Speaker, if he wanted to, if he were being very strict, would chastise me for wandering from the topic of the day.

I wanted to thank my friend Mike Brown for the work he's done in the House and in particular in committee on this, because when the minister's mug gets in the newspaper and you're on television and so on, often the hard work that is done in this Legislature is in fact done by those who are parliamentary assistants, who play a very significant role—much more significant than in the past.

There's one other thing I want to say. I think, going forward—and members of the other side will agree with this, particularly those who have been here for a while. What has worked—and I'll confess on this: I was a bit skeptical early on that you could bring to the cabinet table all members of caucus, because you're always worried that something leaks out in these situations. I think that for subsequent governments, you won't see

that change. There are a few people who get selected for a cabinet position, and that's wonderful, but everybody plays a significant role. I have found that having these individuals at the table during committees and making presentations to cabinet has been very valuable, and I commend it to any subsequent government that happens to be elected, if the people choose a different government. I certainly commend that method. It has really, really been good.

I can think of how, in the past, there were some really good members, I thought, on the other side of the House who, when they were in government, didn't necessarily sit at the cabinet table, but could have made an even greater contribution were they permitted to be part of cabinet committee deliberations.

Interjection.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I wish my friend the member from Renfrew, from Barry's Bay, well. He has come through a traumatic event. I don't want to say he's a very good member of the Legislature, because he'll put that in his literature, but he's a very good friend of mine, let's put it that way, and I had the privilege of serving with his father in the House at a previous time, which must tell you something.

Anyway, it's a great morning in Ontario, I guess, and maybe in the world, depending on your point of view. It's a wonderful day for that, and I thank members for making a contribution. I turn the deliberations over to my good friend the parliamentary assistant, the member for Algoma-Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: It's my privilege to rise and speak to the Legislature about this bill this morning. It is a discussion about how people and goods move across our border with the United States. Ontario's borders are the gateways to the world, and as a government we must be responsible for keeping them safe, open and accessible in order to maintain our strong and prosperous economy.

On June 1, 2009, all travellers entering the United States must present either a valid passport or an acceptable passport alternative at the border. Approximately 55% of Canadians hold valid passports. That is why it is important that our government offers Ontarians an affordable, secure passport alternative in time for the June 1 western hemisphere travel initiative deadline.

Ensuring that Ontarians can travel across our borders in a safe, open and accessible way is critical, particularly in these challenging economic times. Our proposed legislation, the Photo Card Act, is a step in the right direction. The proposed legislation would pave the way for a new secure photo identification card for Ontarians, including an enhanced driver's licence that contains citizenship information. A new, enhanced version of the Ontario driver's licence could become an acceptable travel document, a passport alternative for Ontarians to use at all Canada-US land and sea border crossings. If passed, our government would also develop a photo identification card for people who do not drive or who are unable to drive. Like the enhanced driver's licence, the enhanced

photo card could be used as a convenient passport alternative.

I want to stop here for a second, because we've had some questions about these cards. I want to make it clear that these are totally voluntary; there is no requirement that Ontarians have any of these cards. So if an Ontarian chooses, for a matter of identification purposes, to have the photo card, they can apply for that. If they want a photo card that provides passport information, i.e., citizenship information, they can have it; they are not required to. It is the same with the driver's licence. You can have your driver's licence if you can meet those qualifications; you can have it enhanced if you wish to. It is all a totally voluntary system.

The western hemisphere travel initiative is being implemented in stages. June 1, 2009, is coming very quickly. As a province we have to be ready; our economy depends on it and the people of Ontario depend on us. A Canadian Tourism Research Institute study estimated that border delays cost Ontario more than \$5 billion annually. Millions of US citizens visit Ontario every year to spend their hard-earned dollars. These visitors pour hundreds of millions of dollars into the province's economy, and we cannot afford to keep them away. If we do not take action, some predict that Ontario's economy would be hit with a reduction of nearly one and a half million US visitors every year.

Ontario's long-standing position has been to support the US government's goals of improving security. At the same time, we want this to happen in a way that allows the efficient flow of trade and travellers while protecting privacy. Ontario is not alone in this effort. Jurisdictions on both sides of the border see a definite need for a passport alternative. Last year, British Columbia and Washington state conducted a successful pilot program and plan to implement their enhanced driver's licence cards in 2009. Quebec and Manitoba are already pursuing similar initiatives and expect to have their program up and running soon. New York state has recently launched its own enhanced driver's licence program. Michigan expects to implement its program in 2009. We cannot stand by. Ontarians need secure and affordable alternatives so we can access our borders. Now is the time to move forward with Ontario's very own passport alternative. Our neighbours expect Ontario to take action to protect the safe and efficient flow of people and goods across our borders. This is something we must all work together to protect. I echo the Minister of Transportation's comments that we will provide a passport alternative that is safe and secure. Our economy depends on it. The people of Ontario depend on it.

As an aside, I want to congratulate the Premier. Premier McGuinty has worked very hard on this initiative, with meetings in Washington and other places. I want to thank the Minister of Transportation because of his close ties to American legislators and the discussions that he's had to make sure that this goes forward. I want to thank you, Mr. Speaker, and others who have participated at the Council of State Governments meetings in the Midwest

and in the eastern American states, where we have worked one on one with many American state legislators who see the same reasons for moving forward on this initiative in a very quick way.

0930

I want to also congratulate Congresswoman Louise Slaughter for her hard work in the US Congress. I want to also recognize a good friend of this assembly who was here a year or two ago, Robin Schimminger, on his re-election. He is from upper New York state, and he was re-elected last night. He only had 91% of the vote in his district. I think Robin has also worked hard, and we would like to congratulate him on his victory.

I want to thank all the folks across the floor who attended the committee meetings, talked with the privacy commissioner and made sure that the government was paying attention. There were amendments made at committee. I think there were five government amendments that passed. They all reflected, in some way or other, concerns made by, not only government members, but by the privacy commissioner and by the members of the opposition. There was one opposition motion that passed at committee to ensure that we made this bill better.

I think, by the conversations we had at committee and the hard work of all members, that we improved the bill at the committee stage, and I want to thank all members for their co-operation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I am pleased to have this opportunity to respond to the Minister of Transportation and the parliamentary assistant for the Minister of Transportation. I would just ask a simple question: How much are these cards going to cost? I look forward to hearing an answer from either the minister or his parliamentary assistant.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm going to get an opportunity later, in the leadoff for the New Democratic Party, to talk about this bill in more detail. I'm quite disappointed in the outcome of the committee process that we went through. It was very clear by those people who came before the committee, and especially the privacy commissioner, that there are some serious concerns around this bill when it comes to how we deal with people's information and make that secure, and I'm going to have an opportunity to speak to that in some detail.

I just have to say, this is one of those days where the government could have had a win-win situation. They could have got their bill, they could have got all of the opposition standing behind them, saying, "Yes, we support it," if only they had listened to some of the advice that we were trying to give them from the opposition side of the benches at committee as well as the advice that was given by the privacy commissioner and others.

There are some serious privacy concerns in the way that this bill is drafted. First of all, the very fact that we're basically going to take all of this information and duplicate it in a provincial database is going to be cause in itself to have yet another source where information

could be hacked into by someone in order to get that information. Also, the technology that is being used by way of these cards is fraught with all kinds of problems, and I'm going to get a chance to speak to that in some detail. Simply put, these particular cards are going to have sufficient information on them that, in the end, could be quite troubling if somebody were to get their hands on the information you have on your card. The technology being used, I think, will readily allow people to read that information. The government is going to get up and say, "Don't worry, because it's not your name that's on it," but it's a specific identification number identifying you as that person. That stuff could all be cross-referenced, and I'm going to talk to that in some detail when it gets to my turn for debate.

I just have to say to the government that it's too bad you didn't take the advice of the opposition and of the privacy commissioner, because we would have supported this bill if it had been amended.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak about Bill 85.

Let me, right at the outset, give my reason as to why I will be supporting this bill. One very simple reason is that I have now oftentimes, many times, several times, heard from many of my constituents about the need to have a proper photo ID. These constituents are senior citizens. These constituents are many other non-drivers, perhaps because of their own decision or due to some disability. They find it very difficult not having a driver's licence and not being able to access services which require a particular photo ID. As we know, the health card is not a recognized piece of photo identification and this legislation addresses exactly that type of situation, so that those people who do not have a driver's licence, who decide not to drive, have a proper piece of identification with them. That's why this legislation is going to be of great benefit to my constituents in the riding of Ottawa Centre and many other people in similar situations across the province.

As to the concerns which have been raised about the enhanced photo card for drivers or non-drivers, it's my understanding—and the minister or the parliamentary assistant can correct me if I'm wrong—that that is voluntary, that it is up to individuals to decide whether they want an enhanced driver's licence or photo ID or not. That is not something that will be required of every single Ontarian. So there is very specific and targeted attention being paid to the privacy concerns of individuals, and it's up to folks to decide on a voluntary basis whether they want this enhanced piece of identification.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm looking forward to commenting on this at some length here, right after the minister responds to the question that's been raised on some of the logistics and mechanics of this bill—because there are

positive comments that we will make about it, and I think it's time to move on.

Often, I'm concerned—we can look at this bill as a bit of harmony. The minister was in good spirits this morning, and complimenting all around. There are other bills now, however—Bill 114 and the time allocation there, and Bill 119 is another bill that I think we could spend some time on—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Durham, we probably will spend some time on it, but we won't debate it this morning.

Mr. John O'Toole: Excuse me. With your indulgence, I was making the point that there are substantive things that are before the House that we don't essentially agree on, and this bill—I'm not putting in words, and our critic Frank Klees would be loath if I were to cast any aspersions on this bill; he's been very supportive thus far. But I look forward to the minister's response to a couple of issues, the cost being one, and the relationship between the US solution and how we get them into Ontario as tourists. That's an important part of it: What's going to be the solution for them getting into Canada? It's fine for us going shopping for Christmas to get this bill in place, but what we're more concerned about is bringing Americans into Canada to spend their dollars to help our economy.

There will be more to say on this bill very shortly. And, I might say, I will be making references to other legislative implications.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I'll listen carefully.

Response?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I first wanted to speak, at least briefly, to the issue raised by the member for Wellington-Halton Hills and the member for Durham regarding the cost of the card. The card will be less than the cost of a driver's licence. The government intends to use cost recovery, but I'm not sure we will even get to that point. We want to make sure that this is an affordable alternative for the people of Ontario, and as he would know, the other jurisdictions that we are talking about are following very similar paths to providing cards to the people of Michigan, New York state and Minnesota so that we can use those cards at the border.

I want to say to the member for Timmins-James Bay that the privacy concerns that were very properly put forward by the Information and Privacy Commissioner at the committee stage were listened to very carefully by the government. I want to remind him that in her written statement, she suggested that she had worked with the government very closely in the development of this card and wished to continue working with the government after the passage of this bill to ensure that people's privacy was paramount.

I would also suggest to him that he knows that there were a number of amendments put to the bill to address the concerns of the privacy commissioner, and those concerns included a prohibition on providing biometric information. That was one of the government amendments in the legislation, so that cannot happen.

I know there are concerns about RFID cards, and I don't have time to talk about it, but I'm sure I'll get a chance a little bit later.

0940

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: I would start off by seeking unanimous consent to stand down the lead speech by our critic, Frank Klees, on third reading.

Interjection: No.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I heard a no.

Mr. John O'Toole: In that case, I'll be speaking for an hour.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: I understand that, but these are the opportunities we have.

I have paid close attention to this particular bill, as our critic has as well. I think we want to be on the record as saying that we have concerns that remain but generally support the initiative of the minister. I have here an amended version of Bill 85, indicating that there have been a few amendments adopted, which is always good. I'm also aware that the privacy commissioner, Ms. Cavoukian, has, I guess, given some advice to the minister on implementation and who discloses what to whom. Ultimately, that's really the content of the bill.

But I think the explanatory notes of the bill are worthy of looking at, and just reinforcing our understanding of the bill. I want to say right off the bat that when Ms. Cansfield, I think, was minister, I had a constituent who I believe was from New Brunswick and had just moved to Ontario, who came to me and suggested that they had some kind of identification card that assisted people who didn't have a driver's licence. I wrote to the ministry at that time, as I often do—

Hon. James J. Bradley: I received both letters today.

Mr. John O'Toole: Well, there you go.

I listened to my constituent and I wrote, and at that time they didn't think it was necessary. Of course, this was pre-9/11, and I guess that security issues didn't urge this topic to the top of the agenda. But I felt at that time, and now, since I'm a senior, that it's important. Some who have lost their licence still need secondary identification other than their health card—

Hon. James J. Bradley: You're only 55.

Mr. John O'Toole: Well, whatever. "Freedom 55," they say. I would say that there is a need for this other type of card, and this response may satisfy my constituent. In fact, I did send him a copy of this change.

You can get one of three basic cards in addition to the current driver's licence: the basic card, the enhanced card and the combined card. A basic photo card contains the holder's name, photograph and other prescribed information about the holder. An enhanced photo card contains the name, photograph, a notation or indication that the holder is a Canadian citizen and other prescribed information. It also has security features that allow it to be used for travel—in other words, across the border—but it

still would not be a driver's licence. The third option is the combination of the two, which I guess, as has been described, is optional.

Now, that gets around the issue of disclosure and the privacy concerns: You're not compelled to get this new card, and the new card is not to be used for other reasons. I think it would be convenient for some. I want to put on the record that some have mentioned to me the concern about this, at this time in the history of the world—that it's optional that we get it. Some would think that's the easy way to get this thing through, in light of some of the privacy concerns. So you get it through and, "Ah, what's wrong with it? The majority have it, and they've chosen to disclose this information freely, so now we're going to mandate it." Part two would be that we'd like assurances that it would remain such.

I guess I am digressing a small bit, in using up the amount of time that's required to be used up here. I just want to point out a couple of things. A few years ago when we were the government, I was parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and was asked to carry some information on the health privacy file. This was the so-called smart card initiative to bring forward a health card that would be doing some of the things that this is doing, but it would have certain encoded information about the individual who owned the card and in fact owned the information.

We thought we had an agreement with the Ontario Medical Association on the portability of this information. I think this is important. I got the greatest education in my life from sitting on a committee with Ann Cavoukian, who was the privacy commissioner. I believe the head of the project was Chris Hodgson at the time, and they had all the banks, credit card companies, bank information and other confidential-type institutions that learned to manage sensitive information competently. In that, there are three primary concerns. In fact, the lawyer whom we worked with—I forget what his name was, but he was the lawyer from the ministry who had a great history of dealing with these contentious issues in health privacy.

The three main focuses in any debate around privacy of information are: collecting it—who collects it and who's the custodian of that information, who owns it, where is it; using it—what's it used for? I don't mean the most obvious use of, in this case, to identify you if you're going across the border. When you collect a lot of information about all 13-million-plus Ontarians, you can do profiles of age groups, cultural groups etc. You can start to profile information once you've got this database. It's huge—huge—for marketing, targeting and indeed communicating. What audience are you actually aiming at? How do you aim at them? What are the trigger points for them? So that "use" thing became very important—collecting and custodial issues of who's got it, is it secure, secured by what, and use.

The other one is disclosure, and usually with disclosure—in this case, I can have the option today, voluntarily, of disclosing the information. But in the event that

you've disclosed the information in the health card situation, here's the issue: If you've been in an accident and are lying on a trolley or gurney in the emergency room, it's an implied consent. It's implied that you're there to get health care. It's not verbal and there's no interaction, because you may be unconscious. As you get further down the trail of who owns the information—did you imply consent by signing the form? And that information is being used for reasons other than what the original intent was.

So you become a bit cynical, or you could become cynical. In fact, people are in some cases very loath to the government owning this information—any government. It's not particularly the politics of it all; it's the Big Brother dilemma, the syndrome of "government knows all" and its ability to influence outcomes by having this kind of information. I'll leave that as why it's so important that this remains optional. I leave it that our position is that in the event that it is optional, no one's being forced. It also provides a convenient card that you can put in your wallet. It looks similar to a driver's licence and it can be just an identification card for getting across the border, or not even for that. The basic card would just be to say, "I'm who I say I am. I'm John O'Toole. Here's my health card and here's my ID card"—that's the new card—and I can, I guess, join a club or get a bank account opened or cash a cheque or some transaction like that. But again, it can be used with certain additional information. It can be used in the border-crossing situation.

I would say that all of us would like more convenience in life, so again, if you have nothing to hide, what's the problem? I suspect that would be my position. Sometimes people protect things, and I'm glad that there are these types of people around.

0950

The member from Wellington—Halton Hills did raise a question that has just recently been answered by the parliamentary assistant, Mr. Brown from Algoma—Manitoulin, on the cost issue. I was also on a committee earlier on in this career here—if it's a career—around 1999. I was on a committee called Smart Systems for Health, SSH. On that committee, it was the same issue of custodial information and developing the systems that go in behind the hardware, software and management of these systems, and that thing just got so far out of control it was unbelievable. Smart Systems for Health—I think they've renamed it, but it's the same thing. It's still there today. They've put some other people in charge of it, but I would like to look at it myself. They probably gave all those people severances and hired them back on contract.

It reminds me of trying to relentlessly—government often, that is, the civil service, not to be critical; we need them, they run the ongoing business of the province, indeed the country, maybe even the world. They have a relentless ability to move that agenda forward. I think this part of the bill is the only part that I see as problematic. It's my understanding from Mr. Klees, our critic, that there were amendments moved, some by the Con-

servatives, that were not accepted. That is clearly on the record now on behalf of Mr. Klees.

I would say that the three cards—as I said, four, including the driver's licence without any attachments to it—will still be the Ministry of Transportation. I think the cost does come into it. You've got a whole set of things to manage: different types of cards, are they going to be different colours, how do they get issued, can you do it online, at Service Ontario, how do you verify the data, how many people do you have to hire?

The card is going to be, according to Mr. Brown, less than the current licence, which is a good deal, I guess. However, that's not the cost that I'm worried about. I'm saying, the cost of the implementation, administration, ongoing support and verification systems, inquiries, disputes, dispute resolutions, like "I've got a card; it's got my wrong address." I know now that there are problems with the current licence. There are people in Toronto now, it's my understanding, who, to avoid the licence registration and all other kinds of fees, are getting around the system by using Service Ontario to log on and change their address, so that they live in some place outside of Toronto, to avoid certain costs. I don't think the ministry deliberately sets about to put these little problems there, but it causes them some anguish to recapture and deal with some of those problems.

In this case here, with all the digital enhancement and all the—I mean, I worked in the system for 20 years; I'm telling you. Identification of individuals and the fingerprint served us very well. Now it's all DNA and photo imaging, and now, facial profiles are more accurate in cross-referencing than fingerprints. If you've got the person—let's say it's a criminal who has been convicted of something in a court and all that and you have their profile. The match is now for photo ID—and they use them in some airports; some banks use them—for the eye profiles and different facial features, so in the future this stuff here—they're going to want bio-identification as well. That is some sort of DNA thing. That's coming and it'll be codified. Now, when? Is it going to be next month? No. Is it going to be next year? No. Is it going to be some—yes. That's the next deal. And then they've got it and you're pinned, more like some of the doomsday people talk about.

I often think we have to be somewhat honest in our roles here, regardless of all the partisan stuff, to make sure that we're looking after the individual's uniqueness. I guess that's how you'd describe it. I think it's an interesting topic, given that I have so much time in this august place to speak and express these concerns. But it does come up when we raise this, because you're going to push the line here. I would say, if we have no problems and we can manage the data, secure the data and have consent and disclosure and the documentation of that, if I concede that I will disclose or not disclose that I've had some questionable ailment—it could be mental health, it could be a lifestyle health issue, whatever. Maybe some people don't want all this disclosed.

Here's how systems work. Let's say that I want some things disclosed but not some things—like what they call

the "lock box." That's what it's called in scientific lingo, or in secure lingo. Here's the example: If I put the card down—let's say it's a health card, let's go to that extent, if you can indulge me—and the scanner can read this little ID thing—and some cards have it on there today—it could have stuff on there, as you've implied and released it, that maybe you only want the surgeon to see, that your blood type is so and so. Well, how come the person that's registering you could actually see this stuff that you don't want disclosed?

So you need a layered security system when they log on to screen your card, so that only certain people can see certain information. Then you get into a whole bureaucracy of systems people who are modifying and codifying. To me, the more sophisticated we get—there's a whole group of people out there that just thrive on trying to solve these riddles. Again, I would say, keep it simple; stupid is kind of the best solution. This goes that far. I believe the bill has that in it at this point in time, and that says, "Do I have any personal guarantee in the language of the legislation that it will not at any time in this forum, without coming back to the House, require or imply compliance"—that you must have it, that because 88% of Ontarians now have it, everyone is getting it? If that isn't in the bill—I haven't read it to that extent—we can move ahead and would hope that the minister can respond to that in the two minutes that I have.

I think there's a whole provision in here which is appropriate—this is an important bill. Now I have to keep on track because, as the Speaker has reminded me before, if I digress I will be brought into line here. So I'm just going to work this in here. There's a section here stating, "Offences under the Photo Card Act, 2008 related to the improper acquisition or use of a photo card, including "the offence of applying for, securing or retaining more than one photo card"—why not? Why can't I have two of them? Do you understand? What if I want one in my wallet, but I also want one in my luggage, or with my passport or some other kind of thing? Maybe I want two of them. What's the problem, so long as they're both secured in the proper way? I have two of them, and if it's going to be used for recognition—here I am; here's my card—my brother can't use it; my friend who has a criminal record can't use it because he can't match the photo—hopefully.

So, "securing or retaining a photo card, other than a combined photo card, if the person holds a valid driver's licence ... carry a penalty of a fine of \$100 to \$20,000." Once you get into these fines, you've got the whole court system involved here. You'd better get the chequebook out. If you get charged with something, get the chequebook out; you're going to court. That means they're going to take your house eventually. I'm not big on this whole idea; there's some pretty severe fines here—\$20,000. It could be interpreted as a cash grab, like photo radar was a cash grab. And what was missing there was the process, I guess. "For the offence of submitting a false or inaccurate document"—I agree with that—"making a false statement"—I agree with that—"or providing

inaccurate information, the penalty is a fine of \$400 to \$20,000 or imprisonment for a maximum of six months, or both." Well, if you're making false disclosures knowingly, I personally think you should get nailed.

"The Minister of Transportation may cancel a photo card if it was obtained or used improperly"—I'm not sure what "used improperly" means. I guess if I loaned it knowingly to someone else, or lost it and somebody else used it, you could end up in court there. And that means you get the wallet out. "The minister may also cancel the card if he or she is of the opinion that it is necessary to do so to ensure that it is not used improperly and in circumstances prescribed by the regulations."

1000

I would suspect that if somebody had one, and after the time they were charged with some outrageous crime or something and they have a criminal record—maybe they were using this card because they couldn't get a passport or something to go across the border—I think there could be problems there. It's like anything when you introduce it. It's sometimes very difficult to imagine how the human creature can find their way around—it's like water can find its way around any crevice, anywhere, at any time.

The comparison technology: I'm not aware of it, but I guess they are using it with the Nexus card. Some types of people who travel a lot now have this card with photo ID at an airport. You can walk in and just avoid going through customs, which I think is a good modern-day solution for that particular application, and I'd hope that this technology they're using is proven technology. We'll leave that to the civil servants. Hopefully, we don't end up—but technology, again: That's a whole debate.

There is no solution for technology if you think about it; it's changing so quickly. It's similar to the minister's bill—and I'm glad for the way he worded the bill—on the use of cellphones, restricting or prohibiting the use of hand-held devices. He just called it technology, which is very good.

Most of us here have a BlackBerry. Well, the BlackBerry today is multifunctional: It's a camera; a recorder; an e-mailer; you can surf the Internet; you can use it as a phone it's a scheduler; and I see other members here are quite knowledgeable. It's going to be everything. It's a satellite device; it's traceable; it's wireless.

The key thing is technology. It will be all voice-activated within two years; it's a whole marketing deal. They're giving us the 286 version until we get to the Microsoft version of it somewhere down the line. These things will be modules that you just plug into the car and it integrates into your Bose system. Well, that kind of technology, when you're thinking of it in this particular application, is very powerful, very expensive and very sensitive to change.

One of the things on this photo stuff business—if you get on your computer, you can enhance and enlarge photographs, and they can look right into your pupil. That's the future. In this card here, iris recognition is also another new and progressive identification technique. I

think, if you look ahead—this is new. It's almost like the election in the United States yesterday; it's revolutionary in terms of a secondary identification.

Even now, we know that the passport information will not be disclosed. We know that. That's federal record, and that's the legislative framework. This one here—they are going to disclose it. Some of this data is going to be used to do the profiling at the border: "Here's my photograph and here's me," so they can match them. So they're really using it, and who's to say they're not skimming it and storing it? If you're a repeat person, and they suspect you're smuggling booze or something or whatever else you might be doing—hopefully not guns. I can speak for our caucus—we wouldn't do it—but I can't speak for other caucuses.

But I guess my point being there, I think you would open up Pandora's box any time you have technology involved in an ultimate solution. How did these people who did the things in 9/11 get all these identifications? People copy stuff today, they cut and paste, and they do it online with highly technical equipment. So it's an interesting bill from that perspective as well.

I suspect that the last thing is—here it is here; it's another part here—we're talking this morning in this august chamber when I'd prefer to be talking about Bill 114 or Bill 119. I can't, because the Speaker has warned me, but this bill we're kind of agreeing on. For the most part, we're agreeing. It's third reading. It was first introduced on June 3, 2008; second reading was on June 11, 2008; and here we are, November 5, 2008. This thing has to be in place. I believe the implementation date is June 2009. That's the date that's been set.

Now, we don't know what the new President of the United States is going to do. Here's the new President—and congratulations to him—and I thought, quite honestly, that John McCain's response was equally eloquent—

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: No, no, it really was, if you've seen it—as Barack Obama's. So it is a changing time. I get that, and I completely support that. It's probably needed. We would all agree that the current road they're on is the wrong road. I'd agree with that. I say it publicly all the time. But the expectation level is so high—cynicism sets in after the 100 days—he's going to need three terms. FDR needed three terms. He was the only one who did.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: He got five.

Mr. John O'Toole: He needed more than two, is all I know. Well, maybe Barack should get five terms; they should change the Constitution.

My point there is that here we are, we're setting out on a new journey of hope, and in Ontario we're now on welfare. So here we are today talking about this bill, which is about spending money and collecting money to solve the problem of getting people into the United States—we're really not sure how much it costs—and by the same token, what are we doing to get Americans into Canada legally and legitimately? I want them coming to Stratford. I want them coming to Niagara Falls. I want

them to come to Niagara-on-the-Lake. I want them coming to Durham. There are so many great destinations in Ontario. The former Minister of Tourism is here. I think he did a good job in that ministry, because he's a very theatrical person. We all want to promote Ontario, but this bill does nothing to bring foreigners like Americans into our province. So I would say, there is some work to do on that side of it. It lets us go into the United States to do Christmas shopping—you know what I mean?—but I want them coming here to do the Christmas shopping. The border cities and the border mayors know just how important that movement of people is to our economy and the local economy. There's not much in that bill for that part of it.

We talked about three principles that I wanted, on behalf of Frank Klees, our critic, who has been—because unanimous consent wasn't granted. I don't know the reason for that, but I'm sure it's valid. I'll have to speak to Mr. Bisson on that. First, it's voluntary. We'd like to see that voluntary component assured, so that it wouldn't be implied consent some time down the road. We've talked to some extent on the privacy issues that have been raised by the privacy commissioner for Ontario as well as our caucus and other caucuses, and even in the media. We've talked about the costs of the issue and implementation for the public. I would think, other than that, the bill is—we're basically using as much of the time here that's required to be used, and we do have question period in the morning, so I'm sure this will not come up during question period. I think there will be other things coming up today in question period. I know the minister is relieved to hear that, but nothing I've said here would cause this thing to be derailed.

It's interesting, if you look at the detail in the bill—this is where the general public doesn't have the privileges we do here. This is section 18. It says:

“Power to do things electronically

“18(1) Anything that the minister or registrar of motor vehicles is required or authorized to do or to provide under this act may be done or provided by electronic means or in an electronic format.”

I would never hope that—there's this Service Ontario—that's how you get these things, because we need to do that match. We need to have, as clerical a function as it may be, some validation function, a human interaction there.

I would say also that it says:

“(2) Anything that any person is required or authorized to do or to provide to the minister or the ministry under this act may be done or provided by electronic means or in an electronic format, in the circumstances and in the manner specified by the ministry.”

This doesn't tell me too much about whether I can do this whole thing online—sending them a photograph, promising that that's me, and then logging on and giving my address and all the other peculiar things that they want. If that is the case, that leaves a little bit of uncertainty as to how this actually happens, given that we know today—and the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–

Pembroke was explaining to me that there are people using the Service Ontario system today to change their address on their cards. They're living in Toronto and they're getting driver's cards that are from somewhere else.

I would hope that, again, if this thing opens up you have to keep it hands-on. I don't want it all done electronically—not on your life. There are so many people who are very clever out there today who like to fool the system, maybe even just to say that they can do it, and that's what the start is; getting it right at the beginning will give you a much steadier prediction on where you're going to end up in the future.

1010

Section 19 is “Records”: “The minister shall keep a record of every photo card that is issued, renewed or cancelled, and of every application made for a photo card, and shall keep a record of the particulars of each issuance, renewal, cancellation and application.” There are going to be a lot of filing cabinets somewhere; that's all I know. But that's real estate. You're building in a little kind of—I'm may even apply for one of the jobs there, because there's going to be a lot of filing going on and collecting data. You could probably make about \$85,000 a year or more doing these kinds of things. In that section: “The minister may keep any other records that he or she considers necessary for the administration of this act.” A lot of paperwork in here, and we can see that.

Certified copies—this is good. This can happen today. I'm always surprised that, as elected members who take an oath, have a criminal background check and all these disclosures to the Integrity Commissioner and all that stuff, they know more about me than I really want them to know. But here it is: I can't understand why—they say “MPs and other ministers.” A minister? Some of them are in courts, for different reasons. They can sign things, certify that you're so and so—why can't MPPs? Why aren't we on that list? Not that I particularly want it, but I have people come to me and say, “You have to go to some lawyer?” Is he better than us? I don't think so, and I don't mean that in a partisan way, but this thing says: “A copy of any document filed in the ministry under this act, or any statement containing information from the records required or authorized to be kept under this act, that purports to be certified by the registrar of motor vehicles under the seal of the ministry as being a true copy of the original shall be received in evidence in all courts without proof of the seal, the registrar of motor vehicles' signature or the manner of preparing the copy or statement, and is proof, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, of the facts contained in the copy or statement.”

What they're saying here is that these things are going to have a lot of functionality in the case of proving a person's identity and the fact that it was sought and secured as has been provided.

Section 20: “The registrar of motor vehicles' signature on a copy or statement described in subsection (1) may be an original signature or an engraved, lithographed,

printed or otherwise mechanically or electronically reproduced signature or facsimile signature.” Well, in that case, why have we got all these signature pens if the person isn’t actually stating and verifying by doing it? I know you sign a lot of letters—some of them to me, actually—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Most of them, actually.

Mr. John O’Toole: Exactly. But that’s the whole point. You probably have a signature pen—

Hon. James J. Bradley: No, no; I sign yours.

Mr. John O’Toole: Oh, you do? Well, that’s good. I’ll collect them, because you’ll become popular.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Some of them say, “Dear John.”

Mr. John O’Toole: “Dear John”—exactly.

The minister’s seal—all I’m saying is that there is an administrative function to this. The bill is not some little, “It happened on a Wednesday at the Legislature.” It’s actually 20 pages long, with a lot of small print and detail. I believe that, if you look at the bill—I read the preamble itself, which is actually almost two pages. I also find the content part important. In this content part, there are, I believe, 27 different sections of the bill. It really isn’t amending too many other acts, actually, if you look at it, because sometimes, to read a bill, you have to look at the bill that it’s amending to really know what it’s doing, and that is something that some of us don’t do very well. But there are 49 sections. The last two or three are quite small. It repeals other acts.

As I said, I think we brought some of our concerns to the attention of the House, and I’m just going to put on the record, on behalf of Mr. Klees, who does express his sincere regrets that he was unable to come today because of other important duties he’s performing on behalf of the people of Ontario—I’ll send him a copy of Hansard so that he knows I did say that—

Interjection.

Mr. John O’Toole: Pardon? Yes, he’s probably watching this.

I think that Mr. Klees, who is a consummate politician and a classy person, was probably watching the election results last night, because he takes great interest in—

Interjection.

Mr. John O’Toole: Yes. And the weather is good enough, so one could spend some time outside—four to five hours perhaps.

Anyway, it says that the combined photo card may be used exactly as one would use a regular driver’s licence. However, the card will also display certain information about the holder—for instance, their citizenship—and may be equipped with certain machine-readable features. The features will allow the holder to access the US by land and by water. The key here is air—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Durham, pursuant to standing order 8(a), it being 10:15 of the clock, this House is in recess until 10:30 of the clock.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. John O’Toole: I’m pleased to introduce, on bring your child to work day, although it’s not my child, Kevin Turner and his parents, Denise and Scott Turner. Kevin is a page from my riding who lives in the community of Newcastle.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I’d like to introduce guests from my riding, Shirley Wales and Rick Fine, in the east members’ gallery.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I would like to welcome to the Legislature, on my take-a-kid-to-work day, my niece, Elizabeth Hodgson, from Bradford high school.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I want to introduce again Tamara Crispin, mother of Willem Crispin-Frei, and also some other members of the Crispin-Frei family: Genevieve and Tamara. Welcome.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I would like to recognize Robert Kawamoto and his sons Byers and Ryan Kawamoto, who are the uncle and cousins of page Chloe Halpenny, who is from Goulais River. For those who don’t know, Sault Ste. Marie is a suburb of Goulais River.

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I’m pleased to introduce, in the members’ east gallery, my grandson Jesse Lyle, who is part of take-your-grade-9-student-to-work day. He’s watching me and pleased to be here.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I would like to introduce, for my take-your-kid-to-work day, Erika Knutson from the riding of London North Centre.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I’d like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the member for Bramalea-Gore-Malton and page Shaukat Khan, to welcome his dad, Dilnawaz Khan, and his aunt, Afsnan Khan, to question period in the public galleries today.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: In the members’ gallery, just joining us today, is a former page, for my take-your-child-to-work day. Her name is Natalie LaMarche. She’s from Iroquois Ridge High School in Oakville.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): There being no further introductions, it’s now time for oral questions. Member for Sarnia-Lambton.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): It’s nice to hear the enthusiasm for the honourable member who is about to speak, but as Speaker, I would like to hear the honourable member’s question, please.

ORAL QUESTIONS

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the great welcome.

My question today is to the Minister of Labour regarding his bill that would tack \$11,000 onto a tax bill every year for every small construction business in

Ontario, which he is now trying to ram through this House with little debate or consultation.

The Small Business Agency of Ontario looked at this legislation last year and told you it was a bad idea. You failed to consult the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, which is here with us today in the gallery. They represent over 40,000 businesses in Ontario.

Why, Minister, at this time, when Ontario's economy is struggling so badly that it's now a have-not province, would you hammer small business with a whopping new tax that will force them to close up shop?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I can tell the member that it's unfortunate that the member does not take the health and safety of Ontario's hard-working people seriously. It's unfortunate that the member does not care about fairness in the workplace. This proposed legislation will level the playing field, make sure that we support the good companies that are out there building our infrastructure, make sure that we support those vulnerable workers, take care of the safety of those construction workers on site. That's what we're doing with this legislation. We're making sure that we can move the yardstick when it comes to health and safety, making sure that we support those good companies, the companies that are paying their fair share. It's unfortunate that the member supports the underground economy, supports those that are not paying their fair share.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Clearly the minister needs a new speechwriter, because I still didn't get a straight answer. By limiting debate on this bill, the minister doesn't want to hear from business owners like Roger Gunthorpe of Kemptville, who said:

"Does the government not realize the tough times that small, honest businesses have to deal with every day, let alone the gloomy future that appears to be ahead? If the present government wants to put us out of business with this kind of action, why don't they do it swiftly and then we can join the lineup for handouts with the rest of the Liberals."

With this bill, small business employees will find themselves safely at home and out of a job. Is that what you mean, Minister, by workers' safety?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: What I'm hearing from the member is that he believes that some should pay and some should not pay. We feel that we're all in this together. All those construction workers deserve to be insured, deserve to be covered, deserve to be taken care of. We're supporting them. We're supporting health and safety in the workplace. We want to make sure that all those businesses that are out there—and we have some great businesses—are playing on a level playing field, not being undercut by some bad actors that are out there that are not paying their fair share. We're trying to address the underground economic activity that's taking place. The Ontario Construction Secretariat has said that \$2 billion is being lost. I would hope that the member would feel those dollars would help a lot of projects in his riding and all of our ridings.

Mr. Robert Bailey: The truth is, Minister, you're really not interested in what this tax is going to do to

small business in this province. Judith Andrew of the CFIB, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, is here with us today. Two weeks ago, she presented you with over 25,000 objections to this bill from her members—you didn't even bat an eye. In her letter to you, she described your response to her members' concerns as "cocky," "uncaring" and "dishonest"—those are her words, not mine.

Perhaps the minister should get some tips on sensitivity from the Attorney General, who had to take a crash course on that himself last week.

Minister, is this how this Liberal government treats its stakeholders?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: This proposed legislation is for construction and it's about the construction industry. It is an industry of high risk. We want to make sure that when those 90,000 independent operators and others that are not insured today by WSIB go into a workplace, if they are to be injured, they know that they have those benefits. We want to make sure that their families are taken care of. I know the member doesn't care about that, but we do.

I also want to bring up from business—let's look at the Council of Ontario Construction Associations and what they had to say. Ian Cunningham, president:

"This is a timely issue as the construction industry is actively seeking to proactively improve workplace safety across the industry and address the often thorny issue of coverage for independent operators."

We're doing that; we're moving forward. It's unfortunate that the member cannot see the light.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Back to the Minister of Labour and the reality that this new WSIB bill has nothing to do with safety. If it did, perhaps the minister can explain: Why would it include thousands of office workers who never set foot on a construction site and who have their own private insurance?

The CFIB has said that this will do nothing to tackle the underground economy. David McDonald, chair of the Open Shop Contractors Association, said, "This will force legitimate guys to go illegitimate."

Minister, if it's not about workers' safety—and many seem to have reached that conclusion—or the underground economy, then whose interest does this bill really serve?

1040

Hon. Peter Fonseca: What I'm hearing from this member, like his other party member, is that they want to take a laissez-faire attitude, allow for that underground economic activity to continue, and not address the health and safety concerns of construction workers and work with good businesses that are out there doing their job.

Once again, let me bring up—and this is to the member from Sarnia. This is what Doug Chalmers, director of Aluma Systems, has to say: "Congratulations. Absolutely brilliant. This will make Ontario a safer workplace and

improve the quality of life for all of us.” That is a business owner telling you, sir, how this will improve the conditions for those construction workers, taking care of vulnerable workers. That may not be important to you, but it is important to us. We believe in fairness. We believe in a level playing field. I would hope that you would feel the same. Unfortunately, that’s not what I’m hearing. What I’m hearing is that you want to allow for the proliferation of the underground—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Clearly the minister has limited quotes to draw upon to support his position. He hasn’t referenced union pressure to go after non-union operators. We know it was there because of quotes attributed to a good and close friend of the Liberal government, Mr. Pat Dillon, a union leader in the construction industry. In a news article last year, Mr. Dillon said, “We are continuing to push the mandatory WSIB rates with the government.” Minister, is that really who wants this new legislation? Because it sure isn’t small construction companies represented by the CFIB.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the member from Lanark to withdraw the comment, please.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Here goes this member again, bashing labour, not looking after good businesses that are playing by the rules, playing fairly, and not looking after the health and safety of employees. You may not care about those things; we do. We want to make sure that those underground economic practices that threaten the health and safety of our workers, undermine labour standards and bring about an erosion to construction quality—we want to make sure that we stop those from happening. That’s why this proposed legislation is going to go a long way to helping those employees, helping those good businesses, and making sure that we don’t lose all that revenue that is going to the underground economy.

I know the member wants investments in his riding. Well, those dollars will go a long way. I would hope that the member would see the light and that we are here—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: It’s regrettable that we hear this tired rhetoric. I’m someone who suffered a very serious industrial accident and as a union president fought for years for safety improvements. That’s the reality, Minister, and bringing in a new tax on businesses that are already struggling in a difficult economy with at best questionable benefits raises legitimate questions about motivation. Who wants this, and why? Probably the most ardent supporter of the bill is the aforementioned Pat Dillon from the building and construction trades council and also, perhaps not so incidentally, co-chair of a group that spent millions to re-elect this bunch.

The Speaker won’t allow me to impute motives, so I won’t, but I will ask the minister: Does he not recognize the scandalous nature of what he’s doing here?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Again, this member fails to realize that it is about the workers. It is about the safety of those construction workers. This government and Premier McGuinty feel strongly about infrastructure and how it can be an economic driver. We have put \$30-billion-plus into ReNew Ontario; that’s our roads, our hospitals, our bridges, our schools. That infrastructure is being built by those construction workers. If we’re going to make those investments, it is our duty to protect them, to make sure that when they go to work in the morning, they are going to come back at night to their families, that they know that if, God forbid, they do get injured on the worksite, they are covered; they do have benefits in place. I think all of us have had people come into our constituency offices where they have gotten hurt on the worksite, they don’t have insurance—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is to the Acting Premier. The Ontario Energy Board found this week that the cost of electricity from the Pickering A nuclear plant is the highest of any such nuclear plant in North America, and Pickering B is not far behind. Clearly, restarting the Pickering A nuclear reactors was a mistake. It diverted billions of dollars away from reliable, cleaner, cheaper and more job-intensive energy options, such as energy efficiency, conservation, wind, solar, biomass and co-generation.

My question is this: The decision about Pickering B is about to be made. Will the McGuinty government commit to submitting the cost estimates for rebuilding Pickering B nuclear station to this Legislature and the Auditor General before the McGuinty government makes a decision to go ahead on Pickering B?

Hon. George Smitherman: I want to thank the honourable member for the question. I want to thank the Ontario Energy Board because they had before them a rate request that they refused to accept and they laid responsibility for that appropriately with the operators of said nuclear operation.

Those are old nuclear plants. They’re old. They’re small. It’s outdated technology. I think that there are serious challenges with nuclear technology that first began construction in the 1960s. It’s part and parcel of why we think it’s important to renew our nuclear fleet, recognizing that it’s providing about 50% of all of the electricity that we’re using in the province of Ontario.

I look forward in supplementary to offering more information to my honourable friend.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Well, I think that the minister’s answer lets the cat out of the bag. According to the McGuinty government, the only plausible alternative for

replacing old nuclear plants is more nuclear plants. That gets to the heart of the problem, because at the end of the day your energy plan is all about, "Go nuclear; go big." Your attention to green energy, your attention to renewable energy is superficial and, frankly, not worth much money.

I'm asking the McGuinty government to consider a real change in the nuclear plan. Why won't the McGuinty government direct the Ontario Power Authority to replace Pickering B with green energy instead of more expensive and slow-to-deploy nuclear plants?

Hon. George Smitherman: Firstly, the honourable member likes to ignore a pretty important fact in the consideration of the renaissance and transition of Ontario's energy system: We're getting off of coal. The honourable member doesn't even mention coal, but it's 18% of the supply that we use in the province of Ontario. In the next six years, we're getting off of it. We're not going to be using it. It's the biggest single contribution that we can make to climate change. We're depending on strong conservation and renewables to take up that slack.

The honourable member calls "superficial" the investment of billions of dollars, on the part of hundreds of different individuals and groups, in renewable energy implementation in the province of Ontario. In this year alone, with respect to wind, we're doubling our supply: three big wind farms in a space of a few weeks opening in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The McGuinty government tries to confuse the issue. Nuclear has nothing to do with coal because the nuclear plants will take too long to build—far past 2014. Coal, you've already stated, will have to be replaced with natural gas, which will be very expensive.

I want to, again, get back to the issue at hand. The McGuinty government continues to stubbornly underestimate the cost of nuclear power and the long timelines for building nuclear stations. Shovels aren't even in the ground yet and the fact of the matter is, your "Go big; go nuclear" plan has doubled in cost. OPG is a year behind schedule in developing the plan for rebuilding the Pickering station. In Finland, the construction of AREVA's reactor, one of the Darlington bidders, is three years behind schedule and \$4 billion over budget.

Again, my question is: Will you remove the cap on renewable energy development? Will you develop a plan other than "Go nuclear; go big"?

Hon. George Smitherman: What the honourable member refuses to recognize is, this notion of "Go nuclear; go big" has been a premise that has been built into the fabric of energy policy in the province of Ontario over three or four decades and governments of all parties.

Fifty per cent of all the electricity that we use in the province of Ontario—baseload supply—comes from nuclear. Having reliable baseload supply is one of the necessary features to have ambitions with respect to re-

newables, because they do have issues with respect to intermittency.

We're charging ahead and implementing renewables with vigour and aggression, and it would be wonderful to see the honourable member stand up in communities to support the evolution of renewable energy. There are barriers. We are going to make improvements, and as we speak, the OPA, with all of the agencies in energy, is working to make improvements in the implementation of even more renewables.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): New question.

Mr. Howard Hampton: What's clear is, the McGuinty government is charging ahead with "Go nuclear; go big."

1050

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Howard Hampton: I want to ask another energy-related question to the Acting Premier. Yesterday, Domtar announced it is permanently shutting down the paper machines and the paper-converting operations at its Dryden mill. A mill that five years ago employed 1,100 people is now down to 300. This adds to the 40,000 direct and indirect jobs that have been lost across northern Ontario in this sector. The McGuinty government's answer: Blame Ottawa, blame anyone else, but take responsibility.

My question is: When will the McGuinty government finally realize that Ontario desperately needs an industrial hydro rate, like they have in Quebec and Manitoba and Germany, to help sustain good manufacturing jobs in the jurisdiction?

Hon. George Smitherman: I do want to say that in the circumstances that we see unfolding in Dryden—and I had the opportunity both last night and this morning to speak with the mayor—we know that it's very, very devastating for individuals and for that community, and we pledge to continue to work with them to try to address these circumstances. The honourable member comes from an area that's substantially dependent on pulp and paper, the forestry sector and the like, yet he pretends that he doesn't understand the global implications for those businesses.

On the matter at hand, with respect to an industrial hydro rate: The member mentioned Germany. I will remind the honourable member that that rate is made possible through average consumers in Germany paying four times the kilowatt-hour cost here in the province of Ontario. Is that also part of the member's proposal?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Germany also puts in place all kinds of energy efficiency strategies so people won't use as much electricity in their homes. The McGuinty government misses the point again.

Domtar now has 10 uncoated free-sheet paper mills in the United States; none in Ontario. What's happening is this: You continue to harvest the wood fibre in Ontario, they run it through pulp mills, and the pulp is then

shipped to the United States, where all the value-added is done in terms of creating paper. The McGuinty government is taking us back to the 1940s: wood fibre harvested here; value-added done in the United States.

But it's not just the forestry sector. In the steel industry, similar things are happening: The price of steel is dropping; the cost of industrial electricity is going up under the McGuinty government.

I ask again: When is the McGuinty government going to realize that it must implement a reasonable industrial hydro rate if we're going to sustain good manufacturing jobs in Ontario?

Hon. George Smitherman: Two things, I think, are important. Firstly, with respect to the rates of industrial hydro that businesses in Ontario are paying, these are competitive with jurisdictions like New York and Michigan and Pennsylvania—and the honourable member specifically mentioned the United States of America in his contrast.

But I think what's more interesting is the view that the honourable member expressed on page 251 of his book *Public Power*: "Industrial energy price subsidization can be attractive in theory, but tricky in practice.... I think it far better to work with industry to lower its energy costs through greater efficiency, not through a scheme of subsidized rates."

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Having a reasonable industrial hydro rate is not subsidization. What we're saying is, having a reasonable industrial hydro rate to support jobs is worth more than—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Member from Algoma.

Please continue.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Having a reasonable industrial hydro rate—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister of Municipal Affairs, the House just silenced, and the moment the honourable member stood up, you piped up.

Please continue.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Having a reasonable industrial hydro rate says that we value electricity for jobs more than we value it for someone running an energy-sucking plasma television or using it only for air conditioning. That's the difference.

It's not just the steel sector, and it's not just the forest sector now, but the mining sector is also being hit. What's one of its biggest cost items? The cost of industrial electricity. I say again: Quebec has shown the way—a very reasonable rate for industrial electricity. Manitoba, British Columbia and Saskatchewan have reasonable rates for industrial electricity. When will the McGuinty government get the message in Ontario?

Hon. George Smitherman: The honourable member had a whole minute, but he didn't spend any of it addressing a quote from his book, page 251 of *Public*

Power. I'll read it again, and he can research it; maybe tomorrow we can talk about it some more. I'm quoting Howard Hampton: "Industrial energy price subsidization can be attractive in theory, but tricky in practice.... I think it far better to work with industry to lower its energy costs through greater efficiency, not through a scheme of subsidized rates."

The advice that the honourable member offered then on page 251 of *Public Power* is the policy that we follow. We work with these big users in the province of Ontario, and we make sure that our rates are competitive with jurisdictions adjoining us in New York, Michigan and Pennsylvania. This is the honourable member's frame of reference in his very first question: "How can we be competitive with United States jurisdictions?"

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. As you know, Minister, the Canadian Federation of Students will hold a rally this afternoon where thousands of students are expected to gather on the front lawn of this Legislature. They'll be here to protest your government's high tuition fees and the Premier's broken promises to students.

You'll recall, Minister, that the Premier not only made a promise, but he signed a pledge, as opposition leader in 1999, to bring per person funding for post-secondary education up to the national average. You've had five years in government, and still you've failed to live up to this commitment. Ontario is dead last in per student funding in all of Canada.

Minister, you don't mind bragging in this legislation about your so-called Reaching Higher plan for post-secondary education, so I ask you: Will you be joining with me this afternoon in speaking to the thousands of students out front?

Hon. John Milloy: I first of all want to welcome the CFS students who are at Queen's Park today. In my role as minister, I've had the pleasure of meeting with numerous student organizations, including the CFS, and I will be meeting with the leadership of the CFS towards the end of today. I look forward to an excellent dialogue about what our government is doing in terms of making education affordable and accessible.

I'm very proud to remind the honourable member that of the \$6.2-billion Reaching Higher plan, \$1.5 billion of that went towards student assistance. At the same time, as a government, we froze tuition for two years and brought in a tuition framework which has a cap to it. In fact, it asks the government to contribute \$3 for every \$1 that we've—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: It's nice that the minister is having a closed-door private meeting with CFS officials, but the thousands of students who are going to gather on the lawn this afternoon are wondering why you won't come out in person to speak to them. You're not even sending

your parliamentary assistant to speak to the gathered crowd.

Could it be, Minister, that all your bragging really amounts to nothing and that the students know that their lives haven't been improved under your government? Could it be that after five years of Dalton McGuinty, the students know that only the state of Alabama has a more disgraceful student funding record in all of North America or that we're dead last in per student funding in Canada, with the second-highest tuition fees, the largest class sizes and the worst student-to-faculty ratio in all of Canada? Is that why you don't have the guts to go out front and face the students and talk to them?

Thousands will gather. You're the minister. Go out and do the bragging there that you do in here, or have you just not got the guts to meet them?

Hon. John Milloy: As I said, I look forward to my meeting this afternoon, but I'd like to share some statistics with my friend across the way.

Ontario's students receive the highest amount of needs-based assistance of any province in Canada. Ontario's students currently receive a higher level of non-repayable assistance than ever before. We have doubled our investment in student aid since 2003-04. We're helping 150,000 students per year with financial assistance. Let's look at their record: cut student aid by 41%; increased tuition fees by 71% at universities and 64% at colleges; cut \$434 million from colleges and universities in their first two years. I'll put our record up against theirs any day of the week.

1100

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Rosario Marchese: To the same minister: Like all investors, universities have lost millions over the last few months. Who is going to take the hit? It's going to be students, with cuts to student aid, scholarships and programming.

Increasing OSAP maximums and saddling our graduates with a lifetime of debt is not a solution. Students want a concrete plan that is going to keep university costs and student debt from rising. When are you going to create such a plan?

Hon. John Milloy: I welcome the honourable member's question, because when answering the question from the Conservatives, I didn't have a chance to read all the statistics. Let me share some more.

As I said, we're helping 150,000 students per year with financial assistance. We have tripled the number of grants available to students. In fact, one in four students, or approximately 120,000, receive non-repayable grants. Twenty per cent of Ontario students receive assistance from their institution, compared to the national average of 11%.

As I mentioned, we capped tuition fees following a two-year freeze. Under the new tuition-fee framework, no institution is allowed to raise tuition without participating in our government's student access guarantee,

which means that no qualified student will be prevented from attending public colleges and universities due to a lack of financial support.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Minister, your record is a matter of shame, not pride. During the last six prosperous years, we've had the fastest-rising tuition fees in the country and the worst per capita post-secondary funding in Canada, all under the watch of the so-called education Premier. The only number that matters is that you are number 10—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock for a moment. I ask the honourable member for Durham to withdraw his comment, please.

Mr. John O'Toole: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The only number that matters is that we are number 10 in this country. Students and their parents need help now more than ever. When will your government realize that accessible, affordable, publicly funded post-secondary education for all students is the best economic strategy there is, and create a plan that provides it?

Hon. John Milloy: I will continue to share with my honourable friend. We increased OSAP maximums by 27%, the first time in 12 years. We've limited students' annual repayable debt to \$7,000 through the Ontario student opportunity grant.

My honourable friend mentioned graduate students. Ontario graduate students, both at the master's and doctoral level, receive higher needs-based funding than their colleagues in the rest of Canada. A greater proportion of Ontario graduate students receive financial support than elsewhere in Canada.

Let me remind him of the NDP record in power: cut student aid by nearly 50%; cut funding to post-secondary education; promised to eliminate tuition, then they were going to freeze it. Instead, they increased tuition by 50% and then eliminated upfront grants, something that we have reinstated.

Once again, I'll put our record up against their record and their record any day of the week.

TRANSIT SERVICES

Mrs. Laura Albanese: My question is for the Minister of the Environment. In my riding of York South-Weston, there is a great deal of discussion about changes to transit service. MoveOntario 2020 has raised the possibility of significant changes to the transportation landscape that will run through my riding, including the possibility of new light rapid transit lines.

However, while the constituents of York South-Weston will welcome improved transit service, there is also significant attention being paid to the possibility of an air-rail link from Pearson airport to downtown Toronto. In particular, the recently approved changes to the transit environmental assessment process are causing some

concern. Should the proponent choose to proceed under the new six-month regulation, will the project still definitely be subject to an environmental assessment process, and will the local impacts of this project be considered, such as noise, safety, pollution?

Hon. John Gerretsen: First of all, I'd like to compliment and congratulate this member on the tremendous advocacy work that she does on a continual basis for the people of York South–Weston, because we've spoken about this situation on a number of occasions.

Let me be clear: Either way, whether the current individual environmental assessment is proceeded with or the new six-month environmental assessment is done, an environmental assessment will be done. All of the issues that have been brought to our attention already, such as noise, such as pollution—the public consultation will take place. We want to make sure that at the end of the day the community of York South–Weston will be a viable community, will be a strong community and will be made better as a result of the transit that may be going into this area. A full environmental assessment or the six-month rule will mean that the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Thank you. The constituents of York South–Weston will appreciate getting such a clear answer from the House and from the minister in particular.

Whether the proponent follows the environmental assessment path that it's currently on or it decides to follow the new six-month environmental assessment for transit, a necessity in either project is public consultation. It is my duty to raise awareness that there is much discussion in York South–Weston about the effect that a possible air-rail link will have on the community. If an air-rail link should come through the Georgetown line, it must stop in Weston, minimizing street closures, and give the community a chance to be revitalized. My constituents must know: Will they be guaranteed to be heard as we continue on with this process?

Hon. John Gerretsen: I'll refer that to the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Both Mayor Miller and Premier McGuinty have stated that Toronto needs what most of the world's major cities already have—I think members would agree—a rail connection between the airport and downtown. In fact, the air-rail link is included in the Metrolinx draft regional transportation plan, which was released in September. Extensive consultations have already occurred, through the current EA process and through the development of the regional transportation plan. We've heard the concerns of the community through numerous public consultations and are working to address them. For example, a stop in Weston will be actively considered. These projects can provide benefits for Ontario's environment, economy and overall quality of life. We are optimistic that a solution will be found which addresses the need for rapid transit to the airport while addressing the concerns raised by the constituents

of the riding of York South–Weston. I thank the member for her question.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Deputy Premier. The Premier is in China right now on a trip reportedly designed to increase trade and create jobs for Ontarians. He's supposed to be over there promoting Ontario jobs, Ontario technology and Ontario know-how. When the subject turns to nuclear technology, can the minister tell us what the Premier is saying to the Chinese?

Hon. George Smitherman: I do want to thank the honourable member for his fishing expedition. If the honourable member has a more specific question, I'd be happy to look to entertain it. I think that the heart of the Premier's efforts in China is to work, at this stage in his mission, with other Premiers from other jurisdictions in advancing the opportunities for Canada and China to have enhanced trade opportunities. I'm not personally aware of those elements of it that are specific to promoting the nuclear industry, but we'll look forward, by way of supplementary, to speak to the honourable member a little bit more.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm sure they talk every day on the phone.

I know the people in my riding, many of whom work in the high-tech field of nuclear research and development, are very eager to know if the Premier's there promoting them and their know-how to secure their Ontario jobs. What message should I be taking back to the people in Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke?

1110

Hon. George Smitherman: I think the honourable member would first want to engage his federal colleague—I believe her name is Cheryl Gallant—in a conversation about the federal government's support for their agency. I could say that here in the province of Ontario, AECL has their very best client. About half of all the nuclear reactors that AECL has ever sold were purchased through the work of, by extension at least, all of the people of Ontario. That's been a matter of conversation even in the House here this morning.

As we move forward to secure Ontario's stable energy future, we think it's important that the process allow all of the best technologies to compete head to head. We have billions of dollars on offer for stable, reliable, emission-free electricity. We think it's absolutely important on behalf of taxpayers that they get the very best deal with the very best technology, and we're excited by the competition that's ongoing.

POVERTY

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Over 100 faith leaders and activists are here today at Queen's Park as part of the

ISARC forum. These are people who have literally dedicated their lives to helping the poor and eliminating poverty in Ontario. They work in food banks. They work in shelters. They reach out to those in need. They have lobbied this government and other governments for years to get governments to take poverty seriously. They have participated in this government's behind-closed-doors poverty consultations.

They want to hear now, clearly and systematically, what this government heard from Ontarians during the poverty consultations. Will the government commit to release a detailed report on the content of the consultations before releasing its poverty plan in December?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I would like to join the member opposite in welcoming the membership of ISARC here today. It's a remarkable group of people, faith leaders, very broad representation. They come here every year. I know several of the members from this side will be joining them at lunchtime.

As you have said, they have made a really terrific contribution to the conversation on poverty reduction. Across this province, people are talking about how we can work together to reduce poverty. There's an understanding now that we simply must work together to reduce levels of poverty in this province and that the solution lies not just with this level of government, not just with all levels of government, but the solutions are in the communities. The members of ISARC know that, and I look forward to meeting with them later today.

Mr. Michael Prue: This government and this minister talk again and again about how important the consultations were and how much they thank those who participated, but they won't say in detail what they heard. If the government won't say what they heard, Ontarians will have little way of knowing whether the views of the participants in the hearings were seriously and systematically taken into account in the government's poverty plan. Why won't the government assure the House that, in advance of its poverty reduction report in December, it will include a detailed description and analysis of the poverty reduction priorities presented to it by the people of Ontario, and particularly the people from ISARC?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As the member opposite well knows, the submissions to the poverty reduction strategy are widely available. You have seen them. Others have seen them. Many organizations have publicly posted their submissions to us. We want everyone to be engaged in the conversation. Everyone is engaged. We are only a few weeks only, as you well know, from releasing the strategy that will address the issues that have been raised across the province.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: My question is for the Minister of Labour. In November 2005, a nurse was stabbed to death while on the job. Her name was Lori Dupont, and her murder was devastating not only to her family,

friends and co-workers, but also to all our communities. Everyone should be able to work without fear of violence, in a safe and healthy environment. I want to reassure my constituents that prevention of violence in the workplace is a priority for this government. Can you tell us what the Ministry of Labour is doing to address this very important issue?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: First, I'd like to thank the member for Hamilton Mountain for her hard work, her dedication and her advocacy on this very important issue. She is quite right. November 12 will mark the third anniversary of this terrible and senseless tragedy, the murder of Lori Dupont.

I had the opportunity to meet with Lori's parents on October 17, with the Minister of International Trade, down in Windsor and to speak with the family and talk about how we're moving forward to address violence—domestic violence—in the workplace. My predecessor launched a consultation on September 17 that concluded on October 17. We have almost 200 submissions that have been made. We're looking at those recommendations. I can tell you that the consultation came from the coroner's inquest, and it was framed by the recommendations that came from that inquest on the Lori Dupont murder. So we are moving—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: Thank you for that information, Minister. It is reassuring to know that this issue is being taken seriously. Workplace violence is indeed a complicated matter, one that deserves careful study and thoughtful consideration. It is an issue that can affect all business sectors and occupations. Workplace violence can have a high cost, not only in terms of the cost to employers in areas such as sick leave, lost productivity and insurance premiums, but also, and more importantly, in terms of the emotional trauma and physical injury that it causes.

Minister, I know that you have undertaken a number of other initiatives in addition to this consultation. Can you speak to these initiatives?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Once again, it is a sad anniversary today that we speak of: the Lori Dupont murder. We have made sure within our ministry that all of our inspectors, 430 inspectors, have been trained up, when it comes to initiatives on violence in the workplace, to make sure that they can address those when they come into a workplace and look for best practices to be able to help those employers and employees.

As well, our inspectors are trained now to conduct investigations on workplace violence when it comes to complaints, and take some enforcement action when it relates to workplace violence. We want to make sure that we have the resources to address violence in the workplace, to look at harassment, to look at bullying, to make sure that we can protect the health and safety of all of our workers—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

HUNTING LICENCES

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, last week I'd heard of a problem or a rumour about deer licence issuing. I went to Service Ontario, where I found out the shocking news. I'm going to send over the correct data in both forms to make sure you have it.

What's taken place, Minister, is that the local issuing office handed me this information—the incorrect one—and thousands upon thousands of deer licences are being issued on old data. This week is the deer hunt, the key part of the deer hunt in the province of Ontario. With the data that was issued to me by the licensing office, there are potentially tens of thousands of individuals hunting illegally in the province of Ontario. Minister, how can this take place within your ministry?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I thank the member for the question. I'm not aware of the situation but I will certainly take it under advisement right now—today. I will get back to you this afternoon on what actually is occurring in those wildlife management units. I thank you for bringing this to my attention.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Thank you, Minister. On Friday, I did the correct thing in the best interests of the outdoors community. I notified the local district office to make sure that the correction was taking place at that time so that those individuals who started deer hunting on Monday were doing so in a proper fashion. The difficulty now is, as you may or may not know, the deer hunt started on October 1 for bow hunters, as well as September 1 in a number of other areas in Ontario. Potentially, there are thousands of individuals who could be charged for hunting on a tag in the wrong area.

What direction are you going to send your conservation officers to ensure that those individuals are not charged improperly because of a ministerial error?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: Thank you very much for the question. I will ensure that the director for the conservation officers is notified immediately and that the situation comes to her attention so she can get it through to all of the conservation officers in the area. But more so, I think, is the issue around how many tags have actually been issued. We will get to the bottom of that, and I will get back to you today.

1120

PAY EQUITY

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues. It has been 20 years since the Pay Equity Act was passed in Ontario, yet we still see a staggering 29% gender pay gap. The Equal Pay Coalition, in their Framework for Action released today, has aptly called this a human rights crisis. This Ontario government has fallen shamefully short. The cost of the wage gap in Ontario is staggering. We cannot afford inequality. The coalition is calling for immediate funding

to reopen the pay equity legal clinic to provide support for women filing pay discrimination complaints.

Will this government stop merely paying lip service to the contribution of Ontario women and actually take this necessary step?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think it's really important, when we talk about the wage gap, that we recognize the steps that this government has taken to begin to close that wage gap. When we look at who the minimum wage earners are, they are disproportionately women. That's why the increases to minimum wage that we have already implemented and are continuing to implement will disproportionately benefit women. That's a good thing, and that will help close the wage gap.

We also have to remember that some of the initiatives we've implemented, for example, the Ontario child benefit—which you chose to vote against—disproportionately go to single mums, those parents with low incomes who need a little bit of extra help to raise their children.

So I'm asking the member opposite to actually join with us and begin to work to close the pay gap.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: As the minister well knows, the minimum wage is still below the poverty line, condemning most Ontario women to live below the poverty line. The Equal Pay Coalition and Ontario women should hear that answer as a no. It is not enough to rhyme off nominal initiatives while choking the life out of bodies like the Pay Equity Commission with unreasonable budgetary restrictions, as you have recently. The Equal Pay Coalition is calling for the full restoration of funding to the Pay Equity Commission and tribunal to at least minimum 1992-93 levels, with proper adjustments, so that the Pay Equity Act can be vigilantly enforced. It is not enough to merely have progressive legislation; it must be enforced.

When will this government fulfill its responsibility to the people and prosperity of Ontario and guarantee this funding so the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I do recognize that the pay gap does exist; I think that is irrefutable. We are committed, as I said earlier, to begin to reduce that wage gap. There are many contributing factors. We are aware of them. I think our record speaks volumes about our commitment to improve the lives of women, to improve opportunities for women and to work very hard at continuing the progress that we have made.

NORTHERN ONTARIO

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I have a question to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. The minister would know that northern Ontario faces unique economic challenges. We know that some sectors, such as the forestry sector, have experienced great difficulties in the face of economic turndown. We also know that northern Ontario, like the rest of the province, is in need

of more skilled labour to ensure that we can fill the jobs that are available.

I know that the minister has been working hard to ensure that Ontarians have the knowledge and skills they need in this new economy. My constituents would like to know how the minister will ensure that residents in the north are able to take advantage of the economic development opportunities available. Would the minister inform this House what the government is doing to create more opportunities for northern Ontario communities?

Hon. John Milloy: I want to thank the member for the question and for his advocacy on behalf of northern Ontario. The member is right that we have to work in terms of developing skilled trades capacity throughout the province, but particularly in northern Ontario.

This summer I was very pleased that, as a result of the \$190-million investment for strategic skills training capital projects announced in the March budget, I was able to visit Northern College in Timmins, as well as their satellite campus in Moosonee. During the trip, I was very pleased to announce an \$8-million investment in the Nor Tech Centre for Trades and Technology. This new centre will allow new and expanded facilities to the Timmins campus and the college to offer more programs in high-demand skilled trades and technology. The college is also going to be enhancing its satellite campus in Moosonee, allowing it to enhance its training programs that help to respond to economic development opportunities along the James Bay coast.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I know that many people in the north were pleased with the recent investments that have been made to our local community colleges.

There are many people in the north who are faced with major challenges today. Families are being affected by layoffs and people are worried about how to make ends meet. Downsizing in the forestry industry has an especially devastating effect in the north.

Although we are pleased that the government is taking steps to improve economic conditions, we know that capital investments take time before their benefits are actually realized.

Individuals who have been laid off want to know how we are going to help them today. Many who now find themselves without a job have never been in this situation before. They don't know how to start. Many are worried. They can't begin to imagine how they're going to tackle the daunting task of finding another job.

Can the minister tell the House what services are available to individuals who are looking for work?

Hon. John Milloy: Again, I appreciate the question. I know members of all sides of the House are concerned when a layoff happens.

My ministry's rapid re-employment and training service provides immediate assistance to those who are affected by downsizing or layoffs. I've had the chance to speak in this Legislature many times about action centres, which are specifically targeted to laid-off workers. The member mentioned the forestry sector and I'm pleased to

inform the House there are currently 11 action centres in communities across the north which serve over 5,000 laid-off forestry workers. Action centres offer a comfortable environment in which workers can meet other workers, discuss ideas, share information and access a variety of services developed specifically to help them find work.

I've had the opportunity to visit several action centres, including those in northern Ontario, and I'm always impressed with the enthusiasm and the energy as workers come together and tap in to services offered by Employment Ontario, including training—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. Over the past three days, residents in Greely have been asking your ministry to protect them from a growing coyote problem. My constituents Andy and Jodi wrote to you, "Several neighbours have lost their domestic animals. Children are afraid to play outside or to go to the park.... I feel that someone needs to take responsibility for the safety of the citizens who pay all levels of government and expect something to be done."

On January 24, I asked your ministerial office to take specific steps to help my residents to be safe from coyotes. I'm going to send over an original copy of that right now through the page.

Today, Minister, will you fix the coyote problem by finally acting on my original recommendations so that my constituents like Andy and Jodi will once again feel safe from these predators?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I thank the member for the question. This actually is a very serious situation because there was a pet—and understandably all of us are distressed over the possibility of our pets being destroyed by a coyote.

The ministry has been working with the community and with the city of Ottawa. In fact, to date, I think some 22 coyotes have been killed; four or five of them have been trapped.

We have a responsibility, certainly, on crown land, but we work on patented land with the landowners. We give them permits to actually go in and to cull the culprits in this case. I've sent my ministry folks to Greely to speak to the people, one on one, to see what it is we can do—a combination of how to deal with the situation and also how to deal with wildlife conflict as a whole.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I appreciate the minister's working on this. It's been a long year, and a lot of constituents in Greely and in Barrhaven are very concerned.

Councillor Doug Thompson wrote earlier that the provincial government, through the Ministry of Natural Resources, is responsible for wildlife issues, which you do acknowledge, Minister, but you've refused to deal with the coyote problem. City police will only respond if humans are in danger and city bylaws maintain it's a

provincial issue. So what he's asking is that you actually work with the city of Ottawa in creating a trapping and relocation program and that you provide assistance to the city of Ottawa.

1130

Minister, will you start co-operating with the city of Ottawa? I spoke with Councillor Thompson just before question period. He wasn't aware of your ministry working with his constituency. He's actually put one fifth of his own office budget in terms of trapping and relocation.

Will you direct your ministry to finally contact Councillor Thompson and the other rural councillors in the city of Ottawa to come up with a game plan to deal with this growing problem—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: Absolutely, the MNR is committed. As I indicated, we have responsibility for the animals on crown land. On patented land, private land, we work with the landowners, and this is obviously critical because we don't trespass on patented land.

Having said that, we will work very closely with the city. It is a very serious challenge. I've asked for coyote numbers; I've asked to have an idea of the range. I want to know what we're working with in terms of what permits are out there, and again, how do we work with and educate? Because you need to do both. We need to co-exist with wildlife, but at the same time we must be safe. So, yes, you have my commitment.

CONTAMINATED SOIL

M^{me} France Gélinas: My question is for the environment minister. The minister has received correspondence from the community committee of the Sudbury soils study. The members of the committee are worried about the health impacts of chemicals from a century of mining the Sudbury basin. In several communities in greater Sudbury, lead, nickel and arsenic are above the levels considered safe.

Minister, what will be done to clean up affected areas and properties, and what will be done for those whose health is at risk?

Hon. John Gerretsen: I thank the member for the question, because it is a serious issue. A lot of these situations have been ongoing for a long period of time, and we take these kinds of situations extremely seriously.

As you know, the community has done their studies; they've been ongoing. The ministry has been working with the community to try to resolve some of these issues. But as the member will also know, it's taken years upon years to get to the situation we're at now, where in the past the right and proper environmental concerns weren't taken when a lot of these activities took place.

We are working with the community. We will be developing an action plan, and we would be more than pleased to work with this member, as we have in the past, as well as with the community of greater Sudbury.

M^{me} France Gélinas: The residents of Sudbury, the members of CAW Mine Mill local 598, the members of Steelworkers local 6500, the Centre de santé communautaire de Sudbury and Environmental Defence Canada are all worried that this government won't assume their responsibility for the health of Sudburians. What is the environment minister doing to clean up contamination from a century of mining and to ensure that the health of the people of Sudbury is not put at risk?

Hon. John Gerretsen: I'd like to refer this to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thank you for the question. Certainly our government has made an unprecedented commitment to abandoned mine rehabilitation, as I think the member from Nickel Belt knows well. Since 2003, our government has committed almost \$90 million to the abandoned mine rehabilitation program. Overall, since the program's inception in 1999, \$118 million has been officially announced to rehabilitate. So certainly we are the first government to commit to a long-term funding initiative. There have been many positive advances made. It's something we take incredibly seriously and that we remain very strongly committed to.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: My question is to the Minister of Research and Innovation. Minister, I've been listening very carefully to those on the opposition benches making claims about the level of taxation in the province of Ontario. I know that as part of our five-point economic plan, our government has been cutting taxes on businesses. The Conservatives have been taking a very negative view, claiming Ontario is the most uncompetitive jurisdiction in North America when it comes to tax rates on new business investment.

Of specific interest to the Ministry of Research and Innovation, the Conservatives say Ontario imposes high taxes on growth-enhancing and knowledge-based industries. Ontario needs to be competitive when it comes to research and development, and we need to create a climate that encourages new and innovative firms to be established here.

Minister, is it true? Are we taxing innovative—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I thank my friend from Huron-Bruce for the question. Absolutely not. I can assure the House that the inferences made by the opposition benches are wrong. I want to say that there was a recent study by KPMG entitled "Competitive Alternatives," and Canada was deemed as one of the lowest business costs relative to a number of international peers. Specifically, Canada's cost advantage in research and development was deemed to be some 10.9% below the United States. Our cost advantage is to our advantage, according to them.

This is evident in Ontario. According to Research Infosource, in 2006, six of the top 10 R and D companies

in Canada were located where? Right here in the province of Ontario. That's why we continue to strengthen our cost advantage, our 20% refundable tax credit for the Ontario Business Research Institute tax credit—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. The time for question period has ended. The House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1136 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

EMANCIPATION DAY

Mr. Ted Arnott: For Canadians of African heritage, this year is one full of meaning and symbolism. In opening a new and powerful chapter of history, Barack Obama's election yesterday is a source of pride for the black community in the United States, in Canada and throughout the world.

In 2009, we will observe the 175th anniversary of the passage of the legislation that abolished slavery in the British Empire. This law sparked the northward movement of escaped slaves from the southern states into Canada, via the Underground Railroad. Historic markers on the road to freedom are featured in many communities across our province. In the county of Wellington, the Queen's Bush settlement was once home to 2,000 black settlers in the 1800s.

I was honoured to be present with our friend the Honourable Lincoln Alexander at an Ontario Heritage Trust ceremony this summer at the Queen's Bush settlement. That day, a man approached me to say that August 1 should be recognized as Emancipation Day in Ontario, an idea that Rosemary Sadlier and the Ontario Black History Society have long advocated.

I agreed, and that's why I'm co-sponsoring Bill 111, An Act to proclaim Emancipation Day. I want to thank the member for Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, Maria Van Bommel, for working in co-operation with me to co-sponsor Bill 111.

We should all be proud that in the 19th century, Canada was a beacon of hope to the enslaved and the oppressed. That's why Bill 111 and the freedom it represents are so important. I encourage all MPPs to actively support it.

THUNDER BAY PAPER MILL

Mr. Bill Mauro: Last week in Thunder Bay, a business that had reopened went into receivership. About 200 men and women, some who had left other employment to go back to work, abruptly found themselves out of work.

The reopening was great news for workers, families and the entire community, and was a good-news story across the country. The reopening was the result of the efforts of a lot of people. A labour agreement that

provided stability and help from the mayor and council of the city of Thunder Bay, the chamber of commerce, individual investors and businesses, and our government all came together to achieve a restart. Everyone is hoping that, through this process, a new buyer can be found and that we will see a reopening.

Here's what the leader of the third party said when he was interviewed about the closure: "It was an announcement made to get Bill Mauro and Michael Gravelle through the election." In his typical personal attack style, the NDP leader has smeared several people and several groups. He has implied that the reopening was a political exercise engineered for an election result. He doesn't seem to understand that our government didn't make the announcement; the owners of the business made the announcement.

The leader of the third party needs to apologize to the people and the groups that he implied were part of this exercise, which if he was paying attention, he would have known was announced long before the election was even called.

The leader of the third party needs to apologize to the mayor and the city of Thunder Bay. He needs to apologize to the local individual investors and businesses that stepped up to the plate, the chamber of commerce, and quit preying on the misfortune—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Members' statements?

PIERRE PILOTE

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: It is an honour and a pleasure to inform the Legislature that a resident of Simcoe North, Mr. Pierre Pilote, will be honoured in Chicago by the National Hockey League Chicago Blackhawks on November 12.

Pierre Pilote, a member of the Hockey Hall of Fame, a Stanley Cup winner, five times named to the first all-star team, three times named to the second all-star team, three-time Norris trophy winner as the NHL's best defenceman, captain of the powerful Chicago Blackhawks teams of the 1960s, and a teammate of hockey legends such as Bobby Hull, Stan Mikita and Glenn Hall, will have his number 3 hockey jersey officially retired in a pre-game ceremony at the Staples Center in Chicago on November 12. Pierre Pilote never played in an organized league until he was 17.

Pierre shares this honour with the late Keith Magnuson, a star defenceman who also had the honour of wearing sweater number 3.

It is really a thrill for me to have such an accomplished individual living in my constituency in the community of Wyevalle.

I have met Pierre and his wife on many occasions. Each and every time I meet Pierre, the discussion usually turns to my childhood memories of watching the Original Six hockey clubs on Hockey Night in Canada.

It is indeed a rare occasion for an NHL hockey club to retire a hockey player's number. I wanted this House to

realize that this gesture is being awarded to an outstanding Ontario citizen and athlete, Pierre Pilote. Please join me in congratulating the Pilote family on Pierre's outstanding hockey career.

ELECTRIC VEHICLES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ontario has a lot of great radio stations, and we've all heard about the "power of radio." One Toronto radio station has really taken that expression to heart.

FM 102.1 the Edge is using its media muscle to push the McGuinty government to allow electric cars, e-bikes and scooters on Ontario's roads. Broadcaster Barry Taylor's name would be well known to the transportation minister in particular. Mr. Taylor and his many listeners have been dogged in pursuing action on e-cars and bikes. They've been calling, e-mailing, signing petitions by the thousands, urging the minister to gear up and get going on e-vehicles. Unbelievably, the popular Zenn car and other electric vehicles are still in the trial phase in Ontario, having waited for permanent approval for years now. Meanwhile, electric vehicles are already legal in other provinces where governments take the environment much more seriously. The grassroots radio campaign is telling the McGuinty government to go green, not yellow, when it comes to electric vehicles.

I urge all members of this House to throw their support behind the proposal I introduced as motion 49: that the government of Ontario should immediately approve Zenn cars and electric bicycles, as defined by Transport Canada in 2001, for permanent legal use on Ontario roads, with the exception of the 400-series highways.

To Barry Taylor, the Edge, and listeners far and wide, I say thank you. Keep up the pressure, and continue your calls, letters and petitions to ministers and MPPs. That's how wheels will start turning in this province, particularly e-wheels.

ONTARIO TRILLIUM FOUNDATION

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I rise today to speak to the good work that the Ontario Trillium Foundation is doing in the riding of Huron-Bruce. In the past month, I've been able to travel my riding to announce funding that the foundation has provided to very worthy community projects.

Next week, on Remembrance Day, I will present another Trillium grant that will help celebrate the significance of what the Royal Canadian Legion means to our rural communities. Next Tuesday, I will be in Goderich to present an Ontario Trillium grant to the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 109, as part of the legion's Remembrance Day program. The grant, which totals \$12,500, will be used to make the second floor of the Goderich legion fully accessible to people of all abilities. This will allow everyone from the community to partake in the many events that the legion branch hosts, including the annual day of remembrance events on November 11.

Ontario's legions play a very important role, particularly in our rural areas, in helping communities to honour the veterans who dedicated themselves to this country and those who gave their last full measure of devotion so that we can all enjoy the freedom we have become accustomed to.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Randy Hillier: Ontario is now a have-not province. We are now in the red. Thank you, Mr. Premier.

And for the second time this week, the Liberals have used closure to silence debate on two very important bills which push us deeper into the red.

Why are we a have-not province? Because the Liberals use red tape to destroy our small businesses and drive our manufacturers offshore. In fact, this government has brought in over 2,000 new regulations.

The Premier returns from China this week. I can hardly wait for his report. Did he find the 200,000 lost jobs that he went looking for, or did he agree to export more jobs and businesses?

Clearly, the Premier is fond of trading with China. We export our jobs, and the Liberals import closure: closure of our businesses and closure of debate.

Ontario is now last in Canada and striving to be first in China. The Premier journeys thousands of miles, but our economy does not take a single step forward, only backwards.

Let me be the first to say, "Welcome back," to the Premier. Our status changed while you were gone.

1510

DON LAW

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: Each year, the government of Ontario celebrates the accomplishments and contributions that seniors make in communities across Ontario with the Ontario Senior Achievement Award. I am very pleased to rise in this House to recognize my constituent Mr. Don Law, who was one of 25 Ontarians to receive this honour in a ceremony at Queen's Park last month.

Don founded the Franklin Horner Community Centre in 1984, at a time when there was an urgent need for a multi-use community centre in the Alderwood area in my community. As president of Franklin Horner, Don was a constant presence at the centre, working to ensure its smooth operation, affordability and accessibility to all Alderwood residents and beyond.

Don is a determined advocate for the betterment of his community, and the direct result of his effort was the creation of Franklin Horner. Over more than 20 years, it has evolved into a real home for seniors, youth and multicultural organizations.

Today, at 87 years of age, Don is still an active member of the Etobicoke-Lakeshore community and a great example of what you can accomplish when you are committed to a cause.

I would ask all members of this House to join me in congratulating Don Law on his achievement, his exceptional contribution to Etobicoke–Lakeshore and his commitment to volunteerism in Ontario. Congratulations, Don.

RICHARDSON MASONIC LODGE

Ms. Helena Jaczek: This past summer, I attended a Doors Open Ontario event in my riding of Oak Ridges–Markham. The Richardson Masonic Lodge in Whitchurch–Stouffville welcomed the community into its chambers.

The masons of Richardson Lodge No. 136 GRC held their inaugural meeting in Cashel on June 15, 1860. Over the decades, the lodge has moved many times, before settling at the current site in Stouffville, in 1955, at 279 Second Street.

To this day, the Masons at the lodge, as do the 53,000 Masons province-wide, continue to play an active role in the community, supporting myriad charitable causes.

On this occasion, the Goodman Foundation presented an award of \$1,000 to the lodge to recognize the warm welcome with which the lodge greeted the Jewish community in the 1930s and 1940s. The lodge then bestowed this grant on its charity of choice for this year, the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

Three generations of the Borins family—Harriette, Allan and Mark Borins—were on hand as my constituent, 11-year-old Dylan Shankland, proudly accepted the grant as ambassador of the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

I wish to thank our government and the Ontario Heritage Trust, which, through initiatives like Doors Open Ontario, preserves, protects and promotes socio-cultural heritage landmarks such as the Richardson Masonic Lodge.

ÉGLISE TRÈS-SAINTE-TRINITÉ DE ROCKLAND

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde: C'est un grand honneur pour moi d'accueillir aujourd'hui mon épouse, Gisèle, qui accompagne des paroissiens, ainsi que leur pasteur, l'abbé Jean-François Morin, qui sont venus à Queen's Park pour le dévoilement officiel de l'exposition des reliques de l'église Très-Sainte-Trinité de Rockland. La désignation de l'église Très-Sainte-Trinité et sa maison paroissiale est en somme une reconnaissance bien méritée de l'œuvre d'un pionnier canadien-français de l'est ontarien, l'abbé Pierre Siméon Hudon, qui a pris charge de cette nouvelle paroisse le 31 mai 1889.

La première chapelle, inaugurée en 1886, fut complètement rasée par les flammes en janvier 1899. Une seconde église fut érigée. Son intérieur était détruit le 23 décembre 1916. Cette troisième génération de l'église Très-Sainte-Trinité et le nouveau presbytère, érigés entre 1917 et 1920, se distinguent par leur magnifique texture extérieure de pierre grise.

On peut encore, à ce jour, admirer les œuvres d'artisans du Canada français de renommée internationale. L'église Très-Sainte-Trinité est une des deux églises dans la province qui ont conservé leur chaire surmontée d'un abat-voix.

Je remercie M. Louis Aubry, l'historien de notre paroisse. Bienvenue à Queen's Park aux gens de chez nous.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just wanted to comment and thank the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell for bringing his friends.

I just ask the honourable members to look at the gentleman in the top row of the gallery, who has arrived a little early. He's watching to see who has been naughty or nice.

Interjection: Hey, Santa Claus.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): You'd be better behaved in your seats.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Social Policy and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

Bill 97, An Act to increase access to qualified health professionals for all Ontarians by amending the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 / Projet de loi 97, Loi visant à accroître l'accès des Ontariennes et des Ontariens aux professionnels de la santé qualifiés en modifiant la Loi de 1991 sur les professions de la santé réglementées.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Michael Prue: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

Bill Pr10, An Act respecting Master's College and Seminary.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

SMOKE-FREE ONTARIO AMENDMENT ACT (CIGARILLOS), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI FAVORISANT UN ONTARIO SANS FUMÉE (CIGARILLOS)

Mme Gélinas moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 124, An Act to amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act with respect to cigarillos / Projet de loi 124, Loi modifiant la Loi favorisant un Ontario sans fumée en ce qui a trait aux cigarillos.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

M^{me} France Gélinas: This bill, when passed, will ban the sale of flavoured and individually sold cigarillos, which are clearly targeted to encourage young Ontarians to smoke. I'm pleased to be working with the member from Brant, who is co-sponsoring this bill, along with the Ontario Campaign for Action on Tobacco, the Canadian Cancer Society which is in the gallery today, the Ontario Lung Association, the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario, and the Non-Smokers' Rights Association.

PETITIONS

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm very pleased to read a petition—a timely petition, I might add as well. You may have heard this one. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the high gasoline prices are now unaffordable for the average person; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government's tax on a litre of gasoline is 14.7 cents a litre; and

"Whereas the federal government's tax on a litre of gasoline is 10 cents plus the GST"—which has been reduced by two cents;

"Therefore, we the undersigned hereby petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

"(1) That the McGuinty government immediately freeze gas prices for a temporary period until world oil prices moderate.

"(2) That the McGuinty government and the federal government immediately lower or eliminate their tax on gas for a temporary period until world oil prices moderate.

"(3) That the McGuinty government immediately initiate a royal commission to investigate the predatory gas prices charged by oil companies operating in Ontario."

I'm pleased to sign this petition and present it to page Noreen on her last day here at Queen's Park.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I have a petition from the community of Pickle Lake. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the skyrocketing price of gasoline is causing hardship to families across Ontario; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberal government charges a gasoline tax of 14.7 cents per litre to drivers in all parts of Ontario; and

"Whereas gasoline tax revenues now go exclusively to big cities with transit systems, with roads and bridges crumbling in other communities across Ontario; and

"Whereas residents of Ontario have been shut out of provincial gasoline tax revenues to which they have contributed; and

"Whereas whatever one-time money has flowed to municipalities from the McGuinty Liberal government has been neither stable nor predictable and has been insufficient to meet our infrastructure needs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to redistribute provincial gasoline tax revenues fairly to all communities across the province."

I have affixed my signature to that petition.

1520

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition from a number of constituents from my riding to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents;

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration

each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act as above to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

As I support this petition, I'll affix my signature and send it to the clerks' table.

MECHANIC CERTIFICATION

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I have a petition from the Certified Trades and Apprenticeship Association of Canada.

"Whereas the refrigeration and air conditioning mechanics of Ontario that have served in apprenticeship under the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and have received a 313a certificate of qualification are not having their certificates properly recognized by other ministries of Ontario and their agents.

"Therefore, we ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to compel the ministries to recognize the education and skill of a mechanic certified by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Refrigeration and air conditioning mechanics that have served a 9,000-hour apprenticeship under the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and have received a 313a certificate of qualification have been trained to do things that they are now being asking to retrain to do at considerable expense to themselves.

"(a) The Technical Standards And Safety Authority, TSSA, has implemented a brazing licence. This licence should not apply to 313a refrigeration and air conditioning mechanics. This is a skill that they were taught and learned during their apprenticeship. However, the TSSA is not recognizing this skill and forcing these mechanics to be retested at their own expense. They claim that there is a safety issue but can produce no evidence of any such an issue as it relates to refrigeration and air conditioning mechanics.

"(b) The Ministry of the Environment, MOE, has implemented the ozone depletion program, ODP, to comply with the Montreal Protocol. This is a worthy program but should only be available to refrigeration and air conditioning mechanics 313a and 313d and to automotive service technicians 310s for work on automobile air conditioning systems since it relates to the purchase of refrigerant. Therefore, this should have been implemented as an endorsement to their certificate of qualification, not as an open course available to anyone."

I agree with the petition, affix my signature to it and will give it to page Jenna.

Hon. David Caplan: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister of Health on a point of order.

Hon. David Caplan: On a point of order: I've forgotten what the petition said. Could I hear it again, please?

CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services has launched a blatant attack on our province's grandparents raising their at-risk grandchildren by cutting off access to the temporary care assistance program;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislature call on the minister to overturn her July 2008 directives outlining the temporary care assistance program and grant all grandparents raising their at-risk grandchildren access to this much-needed financial support."

I support this petition and I'll hereby sign this. Andrew will bring this down.

ROUTE 17

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde: I have a petition from constituents from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, and this is the first one of many others to come.

« À l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario:

« Attendu que la route 17/174 a besoin d'être élargie à quatre voies, du chemin Trim à la route régionale Prescott et Russell numéro 8, afin d'améliorer la sécurité routière;

« Attendu que la route 17/174 a été reconnue par le passé pour sa condition dangereuse ainsi que le taux d'accidents annuel notable;

« Attendu que cette route représente la principale voie d'accès à la capitale nationale pour la population ouvrière de Clarence-Rockland, Alfred Plantagenet et Hawkesbury;

« Attendu que les comtés unis de Prescott et Russell ont manifesté leur intérêt à effectuer une étude environnementale destinée à l'élargissement de la route 17/174, en passant une résolution au conseil;

« Attendu que la ville d'Ottawa a passé une résolution au conseil demandant, soit à la province ou aux comtés unis de Prescott et Russell, de prendre l'initiative de l'étude environnementale pour la route 17/174;

« Attendu que le gouvernement fédéral et le gouvernement provincial se sont tous deux engagés à fournir 40 \$ millions pour l'élargissement de la route 17/174;

« Nous, soussignés, adressons à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario la pétition suivante :

« Nous demandons que les fonds nécessaires soient alloués aux comtés unis de Prescott et Russell afin de réaliser l'évaluation environnementale obligatoire à l'élargissement de la route 17/174 de deux à quatre voies, du chemin Trim à la route régionale Prescott et Russell numéro 8. »

J'y ajoute ma signature.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. John Yakabuski: I have a petition here from all across the province of Ontario but mainly today what would seem to be everybody from the towns of Whitney and Madawaska in my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the skyrocketing price of gasoline is causing hardship to families across Ontario; and

“Whereas the McGuinty Liberal government charges a gasoline tax of 14.7 cents per litre to drivers in all parts of Ontario; and

“Whereas gasoline tax revenues now go exclusively to big cities with transit systems, while roads and bridges crumble in other communities across Ontario; and

“Whereas many residents of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke have been shut out of provincial gasoline tax revenues to which they have contributed; and

“Whereas whatever one-time money has flowed to municipalities from the McGuinty Liberal government has been neither stable nor predictable and has been insufficient to meet our infrastructure needs;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to redistribute” political “gasoline tax revenues fairly to all communities across the province.”

Clearly, I support this. I will sign it and send it down with Kevin.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have a petition today from citizens in the riding of Peterborough supporting Bill 33, a private member's bill by the member from Niagara Falls.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents,” as requested in Bill 33 as put forward by MPP Kim Craiton;

“Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

“Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

“Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

“Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact

between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

“We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents.”

I will affix my signature to it and give it to page Shaukat.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas high gasoline prices are now unaffordable for the average person; and

“Whereas the McGuinty government's tax on a litre of gasoline is 14.7 cents; and

“Whereas the federal”—

Interjections.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I know the truth hurts, but put up with it.

1530

“Whereas the federal government's tax on a litre of gasoline is 10 cents plus the GST;

“Therefore, we the undersigned hereby petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

“(1) That the McGuinty government immediately freeze gas prices for a temporary period until world prices moderate.

“(2) That the McGuinty government and the federal government immediately lower or eliminate their tax on gas for a temporary period until world oil prices moderate.

“(3) That the McGuinty government immediately initiate a royal commission to investigate the predatory gas prices charged by oil companies operating in Ontario.”

As I agree with this petition, I affix my name thereto.

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL
FISCAL POLICIES

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition, entitled Fairness for the People of Ontario.

“Whereas the federal government gives more support for economic development, health care and infrastructure to other parts of Canada, and unemployed workers in Ontario get less employment insurance support than in other parts of Canada;

“Whereas the federal system of taxes and equalization extracts over \$20 billion from the people of Ontario every year above and beyond what Ottawa invests in Ontario;

“Whereas laid-off workers in Ontario get \$4,630 less in employment insurance than they would get if they lived in another part of Canada;

“Whereas federal health care money is supposed to be divided equally among all Canadians, but right now Ontario residents are shortchanged by \$773 million per year;

"Whereas the federal government provides economic development support for people living in" other parts of Canada, "but provides no economic development support for southern Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to demand that the federal government stop gouging the people of Ontario and treat them fairly."

I totally support this petition and affix my name to it.

CHILD CARE

Mr. John O'Toole: I want to present a petition that has been worked on by the member for Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, and I support the work he has done. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services has launched a blatant attack on our province's grandparents raising their at-risk grandchildren by cutting off access to the temporary care assistance program;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislature call on the minister to overturn her July 2008 directives outlining the temporary care assistance program and grant all grandparents raising their at-risk grandchildren access to this much-needed financial support."

I am pleased to sign and support this, and present it to Emily, one of the pages, who leaves today.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): There appearing to be no further petitions, orders of the day.

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I just want to tell you that we have the real Santa up there. If the opposition is looking for a present for Christmas, it's time to go.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. It was not a point of order, but we do appreciate Santa Claus being in the chamber today.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

ATTRIBUTION DE TEMPS

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move that, pursuant to standing order 47 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 119, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997, when Bill 119 is next called as a government order, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment, and at such time the bill shall be ordered referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy; and

That, except in the case of a recorded division arising from morning orders of the day, pursuant to standing order 9(c), no deferral of the second reading vote shall be permitted; and

That the Standing Committee on Social Policy meet on Monday, November 17, 2008, from 2:30 p.m. until not later than 6 p.m. and Tuesday, November 18, 2008, from 4 p.m. until not later than 6 p.m. for the purpose of public hearings on Bill 119, and on Monday, November 24, at 2:30 p.m. for clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 119; and

That the deadline for filing amendments to the bill with the clerk of the committee shall be 5 p.m. on Thursday, November 20, 2008. On Monday, November 24, 2008, at no later than 5 p.m. those amendments which have not been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the Chair of the committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining sections of the bill and any amendments thereto. The committee shall be authorized to meet beyond the normal hour of adjournment until completion of clause-by-clause consideration. Any division required shall be deferred until all remaining questions have been put and taken in succession with one 20-minute waiting period allowed pursuant to standing order 129(a); and

That the committee shall report the bill to the House no later than Tuesday, November 25, 2008. In the event that the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed to be passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House; and

That, upon receiving the report of the Standing Committee on Social Policy, the Speaker shall put the question for adoption of the report forthwith, and at such time the bill shall be ordered for third reading, which order may be called on that same day; and

That, on the day the order for third reading of the bill is called, one hour shall be allotted to the third reading stage of the bill, apportioned equally among the recognized parties. At the end of this time the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

That the vote on third reading may be deferred pursuant to standing order 28(h); and

That, in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to 10 minutes.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Ms. Smith has moved government notice of motion number 89. Debate?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I'm pleased to rise today to speak to this debate and to discuss in a little more detail Bill 119, which is the bill that is being addressed through this motion.

As the members of this House know, we are taking steps to promote health and safety in the Ontario construction industry by proposing to extend Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997, coverage to categories of individuals working in construction currently not covered. The health and safety of Ontario workers is one of our top priorities.

Extending the WSIA coverage to more individuals in the construction industry will also help fight the under-

ground economy. Underground economic practices threaten health and safety, undermine labour standards, and erode our construction quality. It is the right time to move on this.

As you know, there are three benefits to the proposals that are being debated.

(1) More individuals will have access to health and safety education and training resources of organizations funded by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, and compliance with health and safety standards on those work sites will be improved.

(2) The proposal will help level the playing field in the construction industry so that companies registered with the WSIB and complying with other legislation will be able to compete more effectively. This will also help to fight the underground economy in the construction sector.

(3) The proposal will also help to reduce incidences of revenue leakage for the WSIB, where benefits are paid to individuals for whom no WSIB premiums have been paid by the principal or the employer. This is a case where we have individuals who are declaring themselves to be independent operators and are therefore not being covered, and no premiums are being paid for these workers. Often, in the event of a workplace injury, many of those who are not in fact covered will claim the benefits and are found to be workers and therefore receive benefits under the WSIB, despite the fact that there have been no premiums paid. So we have good employers in the construction industry who are paying the premiums, who are registered, who are doing the right thing, while we have others who are kind of going around the system, but still getting the rewards for their workers. This practice undermines both the health and safety of these workers and it undermines the entire construction industry. It does not create a level playing field for those individuals who are following the rules. They are being undercut by those who choose not to follow the rules and in fact are usurping the rules.

We are allowing three years for this to come into place, allowing for those within the industry to make the necessary arrangements within their workplace in order to comply.

Under the current WSIA, coverage is mandatory for workers in the construction industry. However, independent operators, sole proprietors, partners in a partnership, and executive officers of corporations working in the construction industry are not automatically covered. This will change with this legislation, and those not automatically covered will be covered in the future, and it will provide protection for all of those workers.

The safety of our workers, particularly in the construction industry, which can be a dangerous place, is particularly important to our minister and to this government. It is with pride that we are pushing forward with this legislation to ensure that the safety of those workers is protected.

There are many in my caucus who want to speak to this legislation and to this motion, and I am sure that others will be continuing the debate.

1540

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's my pleasure to join this debate this afternoon, which originally I had expected to be a debate on Bill 119, but it's turned out to be another debate on the Liberals' propensity to shut down debate entirely in this chamber.

Only five speakers from the Progressive Conservative Party have had the opportunity to speak to this bill. This bill is so monumentally important to this government, but they want to shut it down with only five members of the official opposition having had an opportunity to speak to it. In fact, the member for Durham was next up on the list, and he was shut down when they hit six and a half hours; it was gone. Yet this chamber shut down for half an hour; it shut down for half an hour instead of allowing a member of this chamber to speak to the bill. No, this government would rather close it down for half an hour because they didn't even have the rest of their agenda ready. They didn't have the next bill ready to be brought forward, so we had to shut down the chamber for half an hour. But that's the way they work. "Let's just shut down this debate, because the crescendo of opposition to this bill is building day by day, hour by hour." All across the province of Ontario, as people become aware of the implications of this bill, they are voicing their concerns.

Businesses are seeing this as nothing but a cash grab, another tax. This is something that Premier McGuinty promised again in the last election campaign: There would be no new taxes. But this is exactly that, a tax by any other name—just like when they originally called the health tax a premium to try to say that they didn't break their word to the people of Ontario, but then, sorry, they lost that legal battle and they had to call it a tax.

You have to ask yourself, what is the hurry to push this through? Why not give the people of Ontario the opportunity, or give all members of this chamber on both sides of the House the opportunity, to get the feedback from the people of Ontario as to whether or not they believe this is necessary? I have to—I don't want to use the word "assume," but I have to state that it would be fair to say that the previous Ministers of Labour, the Honourable Steve Peters, the Honourable Chris Bentley and the Honourable Brad Duguid, felt that this wasn't necessary, because they were approached by the same union people who wanted this legislation put through and they decided that it was wrong. They believed it was wrong, and they decided they would not push forward with it. They realized that it would be harmful to business and construction operators in the province of Ontario. And that was in good economic times. Now we are entering the worst of times, and this is the time that the Minister of Labour decides we're going to proceed with this. You really have to ask yourself—and I would be the last person to impute the motives of a member of this House. You know that because it says so right in the standing orders, 23(i). So you know I wouldn't do that, but you do have to ask yourself—you know that old

saying, "If it looks like a duck and walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it might be a duck"? We have to ask ourselves that question when it comes to why the Minister of Labour is succumbing to the pressure of big unions at this time.

I've got e-mails from all across my riding and all across the province about the devastating effects this could have on them. I know the minister likes to say that he has the support, for example, of the Ontario Road Builders' Association. But when they read the bill in its entirety, they say, "Unfortunately, we cannot support Bill 119 as introduced." While they and a lot of people may support a portion of it, the part that deals with the extension of those premiums to all executives, people who are never going to have a shovel in their hands—quite frankly many of them would not even ever be on a construction site—is going to charge them premiums under this new law.

At a time when we should be investing money in our businesses, investing money in technologies and investing in our people, we are saying to the construction people, "Do you know what? It's going to get tougher, it's going to get tighter, and you might have to lay off people." How are we helping workers in the province of Ontario if what we do actually adds to the unemployment rate in their industry? That is what this bill could do, because it is another tax.

As one gentleman, a chartered accountant, wrote to me in an e-mail: "I am a CA and deal with small businesses every day. Most my clients purchase 24/7 disability separately at less than half the cost of WSIB coverage, which only covers on-the-job injuries. I have personally seen an ever-increasing government intervention in small business across many business sectors, and most of it is not serving any public good. Please express my strong disapproval of this current misguided legislation. It is obvious that neither small business owners nor CFIB were consulted. The minister responsible should resign as he is definitely not in touch with small business, which is the backbone of our economy." That's from Hal Ward, a chartered accountant. He echoes what every small business is saying today: that they can't take another one of the McGuinty government's tax burdens. Some \$11,000 is the average burden that this would put on a business in this province. Can you just come up with an extra \$11,000?

I have other e-mails from people and small businesses in my riding. One directed to me says, "John, as a small business owner,"—meaning myself—"I suspect you are a champion on behalf of those of us who are concerned that the current proposed legislation will negatively impact us in future as WSIB coverage becomes mandatory for more and more sectors. Independent operators in the construction business should not be forced to take on WSIB coverage; the cost will put some of them out of business. (Many have insurance coverage elsewhere and for less than they would pay WSIB.) Naturally, our bottom line will be impacted as well, as this will mean the loss of some of our customers, and particularly if

business owners such as ourselves are not able to opt out of the coverage as we are able to do currently." That is from Karen Maxwell, co-owner of the Renfrew Home Hardware Building Centre.

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I am nowhere near the end of my time, I might tell Mr. O'Toole.

I have e-mails from other people in my riding who are absolutely irate about—I'm losing my voice here—the intention of this government to proceed with this bill at this time. They could not—

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Minister of Health. He's saying that I should take water. Water is healthy for us, I know.

Hon. David Caplan: Did that help?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Very much better.

You could not have picked a worse time in the Ontario economy to proceed with this legislation. We have all kinds of time. They're not talking about implementing this until 2012.

Mrs. Julia Munro: That's after the election.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's after the next provincial election. Surely they don't want to go to the polls with this proposal, just as they wouldn't have wanted to go to the polls with that so-called new agreement they made with municipalities last week. If they had gone to the polls with that in 2007, they would have found out what municipalities really thought about it.

But I want to stick to the subject at hand as I know you will soon caution—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Order.

Mr. John Yakabuski: This government is wrong-headed, misguided and absolutely couldn't be further off the mark with their intention with this legislation. This is going to be devastating to small business in Ontario. We want to be on the record as having defended their interests because this government does nothing for small business, and never will.

1550

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Paul Miller: I rise this afternoon to speak about this government invoking a time allocation motion on Bill 119, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act. I'm still new to these types of legislative proceedings but I'm not new to doing what's right, and I'm not certain that this is the right way to go.

I'm somewhat guided in my thoughts by my research into how my learned colleagues across the floor have responded to time allocation motions in the past. Mr. Bradley said, "How I wish we didn't have to debate this time allocation motion.... I simply want to say that once again we see the government using its iron fist on the opposition." Interesting. I agree with Minister Bradley. This government is using its iron fist to stop the basic right of the public to raise their concerns and their support of this legislation.

If his government really wanted to hear from interested parties about the bill, it would ensure that there are more than two days for the Standing Committee on Social Policy to meet and to hear deputations. That said, I want to be clear: Despite this time allocation motion, I do support the thrust of the bill. I appreciate the 15 years of hard work that members of the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario put into this legislation. They have represented the interests of 90,000 construction workers and their families on this issue very, very well.

On time allocations, Mr. Bradley further said, "Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity, unfortunately, to speak on yet another time allocation motion. That is a motion, of course, where debate is choked off in the Legislative Assembly by the dictum of the government; that's most unfortunate, but it does happen only too often." He further said, "I always deplore the fact that I have to speak on a time allocation motion. I would prefer to be talking about several important issues that could come before the House."

This is an important issue. It should be open to full input by the public through the committees process, not just for two days in Toronto, but for several days throughout Ontario. There are many construction workers and their families who will want to let the government know of their support and their concerns about private contractor loopholes and questionnaire clauses.

The Minister of Agriculture has also spoken against time allocation motions in this Legislature: "I have to say that it is with" great "regret that I have to stand in my place again today to speak to yet another time allocation motion. I think the point I would like to stress in this debate is that this is probably one of the most significant issues that this House will consider in terms of business on behalf of the people of the province of Ontario. The bill was introduced a little more than a week ago and already the government has moved to close debate on this most significant issue."

Interesting, when people move from one side of the House to the other. The minister was right. This is a significant issue. Some 90,000 construction workers have been without workplace protection as offered through the WSIB. With this legislation, they will now be covered. But there are still loopholes and clauses that many Ontarians will want to address with this government, including the official opposition. They should have their opportunity, and hopefully they're listened to on their concerns at the committee level, not just passed over and immediately dismissed by the majority on committee. How can they, when the time allocated for committee hearings is on Monday, November 17, from 2:30 until 6, a gruelling three and a half hours, and again on November 18, from 4 to 6, a whopping—and I've used that term in this House before—two hours to hear from the public?

I know that our Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario has been lobbying on behalf of their members for 15 years, and they must be delighted

that this bill has finally come this far. But my brothers and sisters are fair and they will want to ensure that Ontarians, who may feel that their voice will add to this decision-making, should have their opportunity.

Back to my colleagues across the floor: The Minister of Agriculture again went on record with, "Here we go again. Sadly, again, we're here debating a time allocation motion. We're here talking about all the reasons why we would like to see this bill get full debate in the Legislative Assembly." We have Mr. Sorbara, a former finance minister, who, in opposition, said, "I stand here today to condemn this time allocation motion." Will Mr. Sorbara stand here again today to condemn the actions of his government on this time allocation motion? I have my doubts.

Minister Gerretsen, you have also stood in this Legislature to speak strongly against time allocation motions: "It is shutting off debate. We've got many, many members on this side of the House"—which would have been this side then—"who want the opportunity to speak on this bill, and that's being denied." He says further on, "Closure is not the way a democratically elected Parliament should" function and "operate." You bet, Minister. He had it right back then, and hopefully he has it right now, but it doesn't seem to be that way. He didn't stop there. You emphasized your point by saying, "We are losing our parliamentary democracy in this province, and it doesn't do any of us any good. It puts politicians in disrespect"—disrespect—"as far as the general public is concerned."

Would that also include bills that get passed for public viewing in this House, second reading of a private member's bill by the opposition, when it goes to committee and then, when there are no cameras and nobody around, the government shuts it down—all five of them? It shuts it down—no further debate. In fact, they didn't even read it. It's very interesting how rules change when we move in this House.

Yes, Minister, it does put your government in disrespect as far as the general public is concerned. It brings shame on this House and on your government when so many of you, when in opposition, have been so opposed to time allocation motions that you now use to your advantage—interesting. Your comments back then make me question why you are doing this. Why is your government cutting the public off from a fair chance to speak to their government? Why won't you make available to the public across this province the opportunity to speak directly to you, to ask to make the changes that they feel should be made in the legislation? Your answer to my questions is already on the record.

You said, "I would urge this government: See the error of your ways. Do not use time allocation again; enter into a discussion with the House leaders so that we can come up with a meaningful legislative program so that bills can be debated for the length of time that is required in each and every case." Mr. Gerretsen, what happened to your passion? What happened to your righteous indignation on behalf of your Ontario? What happened to your voice, Minister? How did it get lost in this decision?

Minister Gerretsen is not the last voice of the current cabinet to speak vehemently against time allocation motions. Minister Caplan, speaking on behalf of his constituents, said: "I usually start off my remarks by saying it's a pleasure to speak to something on behalf of the people of Don Valley East. But it really isn't. This is yet another closure motion, a gag order on the Legislature. How could it ever be a pleasure to speak to that, when that's the normal course of action and when this Legislature is shut down for the very purpose it was meant for, which was to discuss important matters?"

I'd like to hear your answer. Are this minister's constituents now happy that he has done a 180 on this issue and is party to enacting the very type of closure motions that he spoke so strongly against on their behalf—so strongly against it? Are they now content to have been cut off from public debate? I'm sure that they will not find a stunning total of five and a half hours of public debate to be a fair opportunity to make their views known to this government.

My colleagues across the floor and the rump are doing exactly the things they found so reprehensible when in opposition. They are using this motion called a guillotine motion for a very good reason: because they don't want to hear from a good cross-section of the public across Ontario. Their schedule can only permit those very few who can make it to Toronto and can manage to get onto the deputants list.

1600

Not only is the public portion of this process severely truncated, but the reporting times are extremely short. Once the Standing Committee on Social Policy has completed the public portion on November 17 and 18, the clause-by-clause meeting is a scant three working days later, on November 24. During those three working days, the deadline for filing amendments to the bill with the clerk is November 20. Then, on November 25, the bill shall be reported to this House.

I wish that my Bill 6 had received such attention. It would have been wonderful: a good bill that never even got past committee so that those many workers who lost their jobs would have gotten severance protection, would have gotten their holiday pay, would have gotten money that was owed to them. Did this government want to do that? No, because it wasn't their idea. "It was an NDP idea, so we shut them down."

I won't be surprised if in a year or two they come out with something and take our ideas and try to mould them and get some kind of credit for it. It won't shock me. I'll be looking forward to it and I'll probably support it any way it can get to the people. I'm not partisan when it comes to things like this; you are.

Interjections.

Mr. Paul Miller: I've had the chance to speak—

Interjections.

Mr. Paul Miller: Well, I find it interesting that you're jeering me, considering I've supported four of your bills. You've supported none of ours, so don't laugh.

Not only is the public portion of this process severely truncated, but the reporting times are extremely short. Once the Standing Committee on Social Policy is completed on the 17th and 18th, that's all she wrote.

I've had the chance to speak to the substance of the bill, and I repeat: The NDP—you know, us little guys over here—and I do support the thrust of the bill. We have some real concerns about the home renovation exemption and the lengthy timelines for implementation, and we'll bring forward our amendments to address these, probably once again falling on deaf ears and not even being dealt with, which wouldn't surprise me.

We're also offended by the truncated time and the limited location for the public to bring their concerns and support directly to their elected representatives.

In closing, I again want to express my party's sincere appreciation to the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario for its tireless work on this legislation. Their commitment to their members and their families is without question. The 90,000 construction workers who will now have the security offered by the WSIA coverage can thank their representatives for 15 years of unwavering commitment, and to that I add the thanks of my NDP caucus and our research staff.

I'd also like to say that, you know, there are a lot of other Ontarians who aren't covered by WSIB. This government has taken one small step with the construction industry. We have all kinds of lending institutions; we have commercial workers; we have all kinds—hundreds and thousands, millions, of Ontarians who still aren't covered by WSIB. Maybe we should extend this a little further. Maybe it will come along.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the time.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak on time allocation on Bill 119, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act. It's important to debate this issue.

I listened to the member opposite from the Conservative Party when he was talking about time allocation and how the government is doing it. I want to go back, before I speak on this bill, to the record of the Conservatives. The Conservatives, when they were in power, never allowed any bills to go to committee. No debate was taking place anywhere.

At least this bill is very simple. This bill was put in place before us in this House to protect workers in the province of Ontario.

We had enough chance to hear the comments of the opposition and the third party on this bill. It's important to get this bill over with and let it pass, to see to it that the people of Ontario who work on a daily basis are covered.

It's fascinating when you listen to the Conservative Party speaking about democracy, speaking about debates, speaking about committees. When you go to their record, it was nothing like this. There were no debates, no committees.

At least this bill is going to committee. We're going to listen to the people of Ontario. We're going to listen to the many stakeholders who are going to come to this committee to give us their advice and their ideas.

Also, the honourable member for Hamilton East-Stoney Creek stood in his place talking about democracy and freedom. I hope he comes forward and supports this bill because this bill is very important to him and to us, to every person who works in the province of Ontario.

We have to talk about the essence of the bill to protect workers in construction, everywhere. This bill was introduced to protect workers who have not been covered by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act. That's why we want to include all the people who work on roofs of houses, who work in small jobs. Our obligation and responsibility as a government, as the Ministry of Labour, as people who get elected to this place, is to protect the people. We said it many different times, and he said it, too: A worker is a worker, whether working at a big company or a small company. Our obligation is to create a safety mechanism for them to be protected, to look after them if they get injured or something happens to them.

It's important to continue on with our lives. I think this bill has had enough debate. We're looking forward to passing it tonight and also to go to the committee to listen to construction workers, to listen to businesspeople, and then we'll see how we can modify it to fit all the people of the province of Ontario.

The honourable member is still talking about debate and democracy and talking about committees. As I said, we listened to many people. We listened to their positions. They spoke for hours and hours, all week last week and this week. We know where they stand. They're against everything introduced by our government. They're against all the poor people, the vulnerable people among us. They're against all the people who work on a daily basis to provide for their families and for themselves and also to help us to continue building this province.

It's about time to get the debate over and get together in this place to pass it and also go to committee to see what people want to say about it and how they can help us to enhance it and make it stronger in order to protect the people of Ontario and protect all the workers, not just the workers who work in a big company or in industry.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to speak. I'm looking forward to hearing my friends and colleagues from both sides of the House and, hopefully, by the end of the time, we can vote on it and we can go to committee and see how we can improve the lives of our people in this province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this time allocation motion. I'd like to put a lot of the things in perspective with this time allocation motion that I feel is really, really limiting debate on this.

First of all, I understand, according to what the government is saying, that the bill doesn't take effect

until 2012. So the first question you have to ask is, what is the rush here? Why could we not at least have a lot more time? We only had five speakers with the opportunity to speak to this bill. I think we had at least another nine or 10 for sure who would have wanted to have 10 to 20 minutes to speak to this bill.

Certainly, I asked the other day in my comments that we not time-allocate it, that we have an opportunity to make sure we get full debate. We are getting literally thousands of e-mails from the construction industry across the province of Ontario. This will kill jobs. There's absolutely no question about it. We know right now that it will have a negative impact on small business contractors, particularly at a time when we know that they can't afford it.

We're not going to have an opportunity to even have decent committee hearings. We're going to have a couple of afternoons here at the House. This thing is going to be put through as quickly as possible. Obviously, the government members are getting a lot of negative feedback on this legislation and they want it pushed under the carpet—you know, "Let's try to quiet the groups down."

What we'll be doing as the Conservative caucus is travelling with this bill this winter ourselves. We'll go to communities like Peterborough, Goderich, London, Chatham and Kitchener and all the little communities—St. Catharines. We can go to those places and we'll talk to people, talk to construction associations and tell them, "This doesn't take effect until 2012 and you have not been heard on this bill." They're just now finding out about it. This is the busiest time of the year for these contractors. They don't have time right now to be worried about what's happening in Queen's Park. They take the word that the government of the day will look after the small business operators in the province of Ontario. That's not happening here.

1610

Take, for example, the time allocation. We're going to have one hour for third reading debate on a bill that affects thousands and thousands of people. Tonight, downstairs in rooms 228 and 230, you'll have three hours at the wine tasting. You can taste wine for three hours. Three hours for a wine tasting, but you get one hour to debate this bill, which affects every small business operator in construction in the province of Ontario. It is absolutely shameful that this could happen—absolutely shameful. Three hours for wine tasting; one hour for third reading debate on an important bill like this.

I cannot believe how gutless that Minister of Labour could be to allow that to happen in this House. This is a disgrace to democracy. You heard it outside today—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Simcoe North, I just caution members: I think we can express our feelings here in language that is toned down a bit. Just keep it in mind.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

You heard it outside this afternoon. There are a thousand students outside. They've caught on to these guys as

well. We've gone from a lower rate of student tuition to the highest in the country.

Everybody is catching on to you. Liberalism is dying in the province of Ontario. You saw it three weeks ago with the federal election, when they lost seats all over the place. You can look in their faces and see the disappointment. That's why they want Bill 119 shovelled under the carpet. They have said nothing on this. This is a disgrace.

Mr. Mike Colle: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I think the standing orders say we should speak to the motion before us. The motion is on time allocation. I don't know if discussing the election in Ottawa or the victory of Obama in the United States has anything to do with this time allocation motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): It is a point of order that members are to speak to the topic that's on the floor, and I will listen intently to see that we do this.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I know they don't want to hear the truth over there; that's the reality.

As we speak to time allocation, let's go back to some of the other things that happen around here: two afternoons for small construction owners right across our province to try to get down here in the next week or so, and we have to have amendments in a couple of days after. There's absolutely no time for this.

I want to emphasize, and I want to say to the people of Ontario who are watching, particularly to the people like the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, who have been strongly behind the opposition to this—they call this bill a shame. It's shameful what has happened here.

When we talk about two afternoons of debate on a bill this important, let's compare it to Bill 50, the roadside zoo bill. We had an opportunity to go to North Bay, two days in London, three days in Toronto, one day in Ottawa—all this for a bill, Bill 50, that affects a few roadside zoos. What do we have here? We have a bill that affects all the small construction industry in the province of Ontario, and they get two afternoons and one hour of third reading debate. You don't think that's disgraceful? This is a complete disgrace. I can't believe it. They want it quieted down.

The reality is—and make sure everyone understands this—that the government says it won't take effect until 2012, a full year after the next election. So what is the rush? Why can't we go out this winter and have committee hearings in these communities? It's pathetic.

I can see the look on their faces. The members from the Liberal Party, the government members, are embarrassed by this. It's shameful that we see this actually happening in a democracy.

Last night, so many people came together from all parties and politics to congratulate the United States. I come here today and see 2,000 students outside demonstrating against this government. I come in here and we're time-allocating a bill where we're going to end up with one hour of third reading debate, and remember, folks, tonight we're going to spend three hours tasting

wine downstairs, if you want to go down. Three hours to select a wine that the people of Ontario, or this House, can say is our wine: "This is the wine we're going to pick this year." So we get three hours to taste wine and one hour on a third reading debate that affects thousands and thousands of contractors in the province of Ontario. You should be ashamed of yourselves. Judith Andrew, vice-president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, had it right: "This is a shame." I feel sorry for the minister. He should resign his position as Minister of Labour. This is a disgrace.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's a privilege to be able to speak to this bill today. My colleague Mr. Miller, from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, has spoken at length and in depth about the problem with time allocation. I want to talk briefly about the bill itself, which is the subject of this time allocation motion.

It's a bill that addresses mandatory workers' compensation benefit coverage for construction workers who aren't covered now. This legislation would mean more security for about 90,000 workers and their families. On behalf of my caucus, I want to thank the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario for their advocacy on this issue over the past 15 years.

I have to say it's a shame, given this period of time and the importance and gravity of the bill, that the government has decided to go with time allocation, because I think there are many people in the construction trades who want to be here, who want to speak to this bill, who support it and, in fact, who want to strengthen this bill.

In the last 15 years, the Ontario construction industry has been substantially restructured by the practice of hiring and subcontracting to independent operators. The use of independent operators has resulted in thousands of workers in the construction industry being potentially deprived of coverage, and has created a group of employees who are entitled to claim benefits for which no contributions have been paid.

In addition, the contractor who insists on subcontracting to firms that are portrayed as independent operators, rather than employing workers, has an unfair competitive advantage—a substantial problem. It means that operators are better off—better off in terms of their ability to secure contracts, better off in terms of their business plans—if they're able to evade being part of the WSIB system. This has shifted the whole cost of statutory WSIB benefits, funded through payroll, to his workers, if indeed these costs are paid at all.

When such a contractor bids against an employer who is acting like an employer, who treats his employees as workers, he has a tremendous competitive advantage. In other words, the present coverage scheme, which excludes independent operators from compulsory workplace coverage, has created an economic disparity between firms in the same industry. Speaker, as you would well know, when you have that kind of economic

disparity, you have tremendous pressure on the part of companies to evade their responsibilities, to move out of the system and ensure that their workers are not covered by the system.

It's the position of the NDP that the act should not be a source of economic advantage between otherwise similar firms in the same industry, and that's why we support the general thrust of the bill. The issue we're debating today, the bill that's under time allocation debate—and which my colleague has quite thoroughly and quite roundly called into question, the time allocation which is highly problematic for those who want to make sure that, not just in this debate but in future, bills are adequately debated and opportunity is given to the opposition and to the public to thoroughly address the issues and make sure that whatever bill finally is adopted reflects the greatest possible wisdom in this province.

Let me go into some of the background of the issue that this bill covers. Presently, determining who is a worker or an independent operator is a critical responsibility of the WSIB. Workers are automatically entitled to benefits when injured at work, and their employers are responsible to pay WSIB premiums on their workers' behalf to fund the benefit payout. In contrast, independent operators are not automatically entitled to benefits unless they have specifically purchased optional insurance coverage.

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Over the years, the board has devised and used different methods of determining independent-operator status. From 1935 to December 31, 1991, the WSIB relied on an executive order entitled "Partnerships and Individuals Doing Work in the Building Trades," dated July 24, 1935. The relevant sections of the order are summarized as follows: From July 1, 1935, consider that all contractors in the building trades who take contracts for labour only or substantially for labour and perform the work themselves, either alone or in partnership with others, be deemed to be workmen of the principal who lets the contract and covered as such under the Workmen's Compensation Act.

The board adopted the order to deal with situations with a party who took the job, engaged assistance and agreed to split the proceeds of the job on a percentage basis.

Similar situations exist today where residential framing, siding and roofing is performed in teams, when you have a crew leader and crew members. These—and I will say so-called, because in fact that is largely the case—so-called partnerships, which were not covered on a compulsory basis, did construction work formerly performed by workers. The situation was considered contrary to the intent of the act. Since January 1, 1992, the WSIB has used industry-specific questionnaires to determine who is a worker or an independent operator in industries where contracting and subcontracting are common practices.

The board has adopted the organizational test for determining worker/independent-operator status. The Workplace Safety and Insurance Appeals Tribunal has

used "the organizational test" in determining business relationships between independent operators and principals. This test examines whether the person supplying labour is part of the principal's organizational structure or actually a separate enterprise.

It's the NDP's position that the present questionnaire and overall board practice of determining independent-operator status is not working. The major shortcomings of the construction questionnaire can be summarized as follows:

One, the subjective self-scoring nature of the questionnaire has made it subject to manipulation. A person completing the questionnaire can fill it out so that they arrive at a result showing that they're an independent operator. Or, if someone is seeking benefits for a workplace injury, they can answer the questions in way that may portray them as a worker entitled to benefits. A person seeking to opt out of insurance answers the questions to achieve an independent-operator result, and in many cases, persons are instructed by a prospective employer to obtain an independent-operator ruling from the WSIB as a condition of employment.

Now, that's quite astounding to me when you think about people who work on construction sites; people who deal with very powerful tools, with very heavy weights, with very sharp objects; people who are subjected, on a regular basis, to workplace injury, and in some cases death. In my riding alone, in the last year, there was a person who was killed on a construction site, a young apprentice electrician.

People risk life and limb on these work sites, and the simple reality is that if they have been denied insurance or if, as a condition of getting employment, they've complied with an employer's request, then they're out of luck. That is a substantial problem. It's a substantial problem for the individual workers, and I'd say it's a substantial problem for society as a whole.

Again, in line with the comments from my colleague from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, to limit debate on that issue is an error, because in fact there are many areas where this bill has to be strengthened. When we say we support the thrust of it, it doesn't mean we agree with everything that's in the bill. We know that there's a lot that has to be done.

My colleague here from Nickel Belt wants to speak about this bill and speak about the injustices that people who deal with the WSIB encounter. That's not the substance of this bill. I wish it was the substance of this bill. I wish it was an additional part of this bill so that we could get at those issues, because we hear about them on a daily basis in our constituency offices.

Financial incentives drive the push for independent-operator status. For example, employers are relieved from paying WSIB premiums, experience-rating adjustments and other payroll taxes for persons portraying themselves as independent operators.

Another factor is that independent operators are able to make deductions for business expenses as self-

employed persons and pay income tax at a lower rate than that of an employee.

All of this means that not only is the WSIB experiencing a revenue loss, but so is government as a whole experiencing a loss for deductions that should have been made. Some employers are not reporting, or are under-reporting, payroll and premiums for persons being portrayed as independent operators but whom the WSIB considers to be workers. The effect of this behaviour is that the WSIB is not collecting the full amount of employer premiums it should be from the industry, since independent operators have the option of declining WSIB optional insurance.

Very few independent operators purchase WSIB optional insurance or are required to validate proof of WSIB coverage to the principal. In fact, it's estimated that the WSIB is losing \$350 million per year in unpaid premiums. When I talk to workers in my riding, people who have been trying to live on an allowance that is declining in real purchasing power every year because of inflation, when I talk to people who have, in one way or another, been victimized by a system that consistently cuts away at the support they should be receiving because they are not physically able to work, and then I look at a loss of an amount of money as great as \$350 million per year, there's no doubt in my mind that those loopholes have to be closed, that the money has to be collected and that the money has to be flowed through to those workers, those people who have been injured on the job, who rightly deserve to be properly supported, because it is their labour in dangerous situations that builds the houses, makes the products and gives us the support in this society that we need to live decently. Frankly, when people take those risks—and they are real risks—at the very least what we can do is provide them with an insurance system and an income support system that will allow them to live decently.

When you have a \$350-million hole in your system, it is very different, very difficult to make everything balance. When you have the loopholes we have now, accident prevention and workplace health and safety are being compromised. Under the present flawed system, the responsibility for workplace safety and prevention is being pushed down to the lowest level: the independent operator. This has the effect of constructors and contractors absolving themselves of the responsibility for workplace health and safety and experience rating adjustments for the persons they hire primarily to perform labour. In addition, under the existing system some workers are being pressured by contractors to register themselves as employers—employers. Like independent operators, these “employers” are not covered unless they purchase optional insurance from the WSIB.

In short, independent operators leave registered legitimate contractors to foot the bill. There's no countervailing reduction in injuries to offset the lost revenue. Just because you declare yourself an independent contractor doesn't mean that you're suddenly, magically taken away from all the risks that exist in reality on a

construction site, and the rest of the industry, where people are paying premiums, are stuck with serious compensation claims that can't be ignored or left unreported.

In the case of medical aid, the burden has shifted to the health care system without being handled by the WSIB as it should be.

I know my colleagues will want to address a number of issues related to this bill and I will leave the rest of my time for them. It's my hope that this bill will have a proper and thorough debate, that there will be adequate committee hearings and adequate third reading debate, that the bill will be strengthened and that the loopholes will be eliminated.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I want to speak about the time allocation today, as that is what we are debating in the House. I want to take a little history lesson here for a minute and just set the record straight because I think there have been a lot of comments made. I just want to bring this information forward so that all members of the House have the same information.

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The NDP government changed the standing orders in 1992, making it easier to time-allocate bills. So the government was able to put forward a debatable motion unilaterally imposing limits on the length of debates on government bills and motions. These reforms marked the first time that time allocation was codified in the standing orders. Previously, time allocation motions were presented of substantive government motions that required debate.

So I say to you, it began with the NDP government, and I just wanted to share that information with the member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek. I do want to say that the NDP government time-allocated 25.61% of its bills.

Just so everyone knows, this is the research that was brought forward. So if one chooses to argue with the researchers, I welcome them to do that, or, I would also like to encourage them, as I can hear the member heckling me, to take the time to research and have a look at it themselves.

I do want to get on to the previous Tory government. I did say the NDP government was 25.61%, but I tell you, if we're going to hand out any prizes here today, there's one government that gets the great big birthday cake, and I'll tell you who that is: the previous Tory government. I must say, I did have a little chuckle when the member from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke said, “If it walks like a duck and it quacks like a duck, then it must be a duck.” Well, I'm here to tell you today, then, we can hear the quack, quack, and they're heading south over there. What do you think the percentage was? I'm telling you, I was shocked when I saw what it was. I didn't have the privilege of being here, but time-allocated was—let's remind everyone, over on this side we have 25.61%—but I tell you, quack, quack, 61% of its bills, under the last Conservative government. But there's more: Of the 66

bills that were time-allocated, 29 received not a minute of committee time.

I tell you, when I hear the member from Durham talking about the protesters and I hear them talking about the concerns, I've got to wonder, did they ever hear anything while they were in government? Do you know what? They didn't. And do you know why? Because they didn't have committee hearings on a lot of the bills that came forward—but 66 bills that were time-allocated received no committee and 30 received no third reading debate.

So I say to you, if it walks like a duck and it quacks like a duck, then it's probably heading south, and that's where you're going.

I do want to get it on the record—because I know that there will be members who are saying, “What she's saying over there? Where do the Liberals stand in all of this? Where does the government stand?”—that to time-allocate any piece of legislation, I believe, is a decision that has to be given due consideration, because it is a very important decision and should not be taken lightly. This government has not only committed to committee hearings, but we understand that talking to the people is such an important part of legislation, to make sure that we get it right.

I know that the members from across the way are saying, “What does that member from Huron—Bruce know? We're anxious to know. Don't hold back on what that information is.” So here's the percentage of the previous and continuing government: 24.77%. So you can see from that, we do not use time allocation without giving it due consideration, and it's a very thoughtful process. We've also committed to the committee hearings, and we commit to move forward in a manner that is respectful of all communities.

So I just wanted to get the actual facts on the record. Certainly this is information that is available to all the members, as it is from the library.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I rise in the House today to oppose the imposition of time allocation on Bill 119.

At a time when our businesses, especially our small businesses, need to work side by side with our government to create a positive work environment to help the economy, the McGuinty government takes an entire sector of our economy and decimates it in one fell swoop. To add insult to injury, this bill is being rushed at a pace that would make your head spin.

The proposed WSIB changes may be directed specifically at the construction industry, but the ripple effect is significant.

Premier McGuinty plans to add an average of about \$11,000 a year to the WSIB fees for small to medium-sized construction businesses. That's an area of our economy that's suffering already. Minister, I defy you to find a small or medium-sized business that can afford that kind of increase at this point in time.

To the minister and to the Premier: If your government is so proud of this legislation, then why are you

cutting the debate time and limiting the opportunity to hear from stakeholders and all of the business community that's affected? What's the big rush? Nothing is going to happen until 2012 anyway.

This legislation is affecting real people who are trying to run a small business and raise a family and contribute to the Ontario economy and also our quality of life. But don't just take my word for it. One of my constituents writes:

“The WSIB is the most inefficient, unhelpful and least constructive of all the government bureaucracies. Hundreds of honestly injured people are eliminated from claiming benefits (the big excuse is pre-existing condition).”

“I know two hard-working people over 45 years old, who did some additional damage to their back while working and they got absolutely nothing.

“Meanwhile, multitudes of frauds bilk the system. Any increase in the WSIB responsibility will simply increase the underground economy and inefficiency of this ridiculous circus.

“I am a small business owner living in Burlington and I would like to protest this legislation.”

But this person probably won't even be given the time to protest the legislation, because we've limited the time for these businesses to be able to speak against the legislation. In fact, everybody has to come to the centre of the earth, to Toronto, on either the 17th or 18th of November, and if they can't do so, they're fairly limited. We've had more ability to speak to issues that are far less important than this.

We hear all the time that instead of fixing what's broken, the McGuinty government just throws more money at it and hopes that it goes away. If the problem with the WSIB is systemic, then let's fix it at the root of the problem.

Minister, I want you to listen carefully to the following statements made by one of the business owners you're about to penalize without the ability to properly express their objections:

“Let's consider the consequences of enacting such legislation. This isn't simply a matter of contradictory policy that will result in no real benefit; it will increase costs to businesses in the construction sector.

“In the case of small businesses, this additional cost could easily mean the difference between staying competitive and going out of business.

“This will make it virtually impossible for new companies to come into the market, which would create jobs and subsequent taxable income.

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“When faced with the prospect of going out of business, no one is going to just lay down and die; they will do whatever they have to.

“This includes letting go of employees and hiring fewer workers. As for the employees who no longer have employment, this will increase the burden on the welfare system,” and certainly increase our unemployment rate.

So I think my constituent makes some very good points that speak to that bigger picture and the ripple effect that I mentioned earlier.

The entrepreneur makes sense. The business owners who are actually carrying the economy on their backs are making sense. So why won't the McGuinty government listen? Why is this government in such a rush to move this forward? We need to understand the full impact of this legislation. We need to hear from those who will be directly affected in an appropriate way, not just from large organizations and lobby groups.

I received the following e-mail from another businessperson in my riding:

"The WSIB mandatory coverage of directors and management legislation that has been tabled will not help curb the underground industry. Just think about it: If a contractor is working for a legitimate business, that legitimate business won't do an under the table deal. No receipt, no tax deduction.

"If a contractor is doing something for a homeowner who doesn't care about a receipt, this will only make a legitimate contractor even more expensive, hence, making the underground economy even more attractive.

"What honest business owner would go off on comp? It's the kiss of death for a business both in terms of future premiums and drive for the business.

"If the real initiative is to generate more premiums for the WSIB, then stand up and call it for what it is." He says, "My business is off 70% due to the battering and fear of this economy and the wild fluctuations of the Canadian dollar.

"I have no doubt that I will recover but I don't believe that adding a 'tax' to small business will in any way curb the under the table dealings and will only stifle what is going to be an already difficult recovery.

"Take a lesson from the US history. The 'Great Depression' was deeper and longer due to inappropriate government interventions such as increased taxes and excessive regulations to 'level the playing field.'

"Governments can't resolve macroeconomic issues by imposing microeconomic policies.

"Let the entrepreneur do what they do best: make jobs, make money and make the economy grow," and thereby create a quality of life that we all enjoy here in Ontario.

I can't agree more. It is our job to protect and enhance the economic climate, not to penalize those struggling to employ the very Ontarians we talk about.

The benefit of the doubt is that this legislation may be well intentioned, but it certainly is not well thought out. By shutting down debate, limiting the time that hearings can take place, and only holding committee meetings in Toronto, you are only shutting out the very people you are professing to try to help. This is democracy at its worst. I only hope these companies can hang on until 2011, when the PC Party can throw them the lifeline they desperately need.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Du côté des néo-démocrates, nous sommes en faveur du droit au débat et à la liberté d'expression. Nous avons nullement l'intention de faire dérailler l'adoption du projet de loi 119, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail, mais nous n'acceptons pas que les débats soient limités de façon arbitraire.

Ça fait plus de 15 ans que les ouvriers et ouvrières de la construction poussent afin d'obtenir ce changement, un changement qui va donner le droit à plus de 90 000 travailleurs et travailleuses de la construction d'être couverts par l'assurance contre les accidents du travail, ou la compensation, comme on l'appelle dans le milieu.

Depuis 1997, lorsque la Loi sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail a été proclamée et modifiée pour la dernière fois, les choses ont bien changé. Dans le domaine de la construction, il y a de plus en plus de sous-traitants. Il y a de plus en plus de travailleurs et travailleuses indépendants. La loi, en ce moment, comme elle est écrite, exclut ces travailleurs, ces hommes et ces femmes. Le nouveau projet de loi leur donne le droit à cette assurance et le droit d'être couverts par la compensation.

Ces hommes et ces femmes vont peut-être recevoir, en ce moment, les avantages s'ils ont un accident mais leur employeur n'a pas contribué, ce qui contribue à faire un grand déficit dans ce programme. À plusieurs autres occasions, les entrepreneurs généraux vont insister pour que les gens qu'ils embauchent se déclarent travailleurs indépendants. La raison, c'est pour avoir un avantage compétitif. Ils veulent que les gens se déclarent indépendants pour ne pas avoir à payer leur cotisation. Ils sont capables ainsi de diminuer leurs coûts, mais vraiment, il y a un coût : ils mettent la santé et la sécurité de leurs travailleurs et travailleuses à risque.

Ceux qui sont les plus à risque sont les jeunes, qui n'ont pas beaucoup d'expérience et qui n'ont pas beaucoup d'options. Ils commencent, ils ont des dettes, un paiement d'auto, une hypothèque à payer. Ils ont peut-être des petits enfants à la maison à nourrir. La santé et la sécurité de ces gens sont mises à risque à tous les jours à cause de la situation actuelle. Le projet de loi 119 nous permettrait de changer ça.

Je ne veux pas que vous preniez pour acquis que tout va bien avec la compensation. J'ai passé 25 ans dans le milieu de la santé, et non, tout ne va pas bien. C'est un programme qui est difficile et ardu. Dans mon bureau de comté j'ai une travailleuse à temps plein qui est là pour aider les gens au travers du processus d'appel, de demande, de prestation etc. Ce n'est pas facile. Dans ma famille, mon mari est en train de passer au travers de ce processus lui-même. Mais autant que l'on dit que le programme de la compensation pourrait être amélioré—et oui, il y a place à l'amélioration—autant que l'on dit que l'assurance privée, qu'elle soit d'or, de platine ou de n'importe quel métal—ça, c'est encore plus dangereux, et quand vous en avez besoin, c'est encore plus difficile d'en retirer les bénéfices.

Comme je disais, plusieurs employeurs vont demander que leurs employés se fassent identifier comme travail-

leurs indépendants. It is the position of the NDP that the act should not be a source of economic advantage between otherwise similar firms of the same industry. This is why we support the general thrust of this bill. You cannot put the health and safety of a worker at risk so that you have a competitive advantage when you're bidding on a construction job. This is wrong. This is a loophole that should be closed. This is why the NDP supports the general thrust of this bill.

Independent contractors are not automatically entitled to benefits unless they have specifically purchased optional insurance coverage. Over the years, the board has seen that this hasn't served the public well.

The WSIB relies on an executive order titled "Partnerships and Individuals Doing Work in the Building Trades," dating back to 1935. My colleague has talked about how this has been used in the past. The so-called partnerships, which were not compulsorily covered, did what other construction workers were doing while they were completely covered. This situation was contrary to the act.

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WSIB certainly is not without its faults. There are lots of people out there who have legitimate claims but have a hard time collecting benefits. When I was at the community health centre, we had dozens of cases that we had to help through, but it is still a worthwhile program that will improve the health and safety of construction workers and for this we support the thrust of this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate today. I think, as we consider if this bill is worthy of support, we might want to take a look at our society here in Ontario. There are very few places in the world, if any, where I would prefer to live, raise a family or do business other than in this province, right here where I live.

One of the hallmarks of that society is that we have a very pro-business environment here in Ontario. We like business to prosper. We assist business to prosper where it's applicable and where it's appropriate for the government to do that.

We're in favour of such things as a clean environment. We're also in favour of public education—I think all parties would agree on that—and public health care. We have a very distinct difference between ourselves and the rest of the world when we look at the way we provide health care.

So I think it doesn't go too far out of the realm of being reasonable to suggest that there's an expectation in this province that when a man or a woman goes to work in the morning, they return to their home safely at night. I think that's really the basis of what this issue is all about at the end of the day.

What we're asking here is that those businesses currently operating outside of the realm of a responsible public and health safety regime to move into that regime and pay their fair share of the cost. There's a choice to be

made as to whether you want to support this bill here today or not. Certainly that's a choice of every member of this House to make for themselves. But what I won't choose to do—and I've listened carefully to the opposition today—is to become an apologist for those who choose to operate outside the system to try to gain a competitive advantage over those businesses that have set up shop right here in Ontario, that employ Ontario workers, that pay Ontario taxes, that pay unemployment insurance, that pay all the benefits that we attribute to a healthy lifestyle within this province.

I will not vote against those people. They are the people I'm in favour of. Who I want to see brought into the fold are those people who up until now have been able to operate outside that sphere. Any time that I've sat down with business and any time I've sat down with labour, the constant message has been, "Leave the good guys alone. Go after the bad guys." There's somebody out there in the province of Ontario right now who is not paying their fair share, somebody who is putting the livelihoods and the health and safety of their employees at risk and is not paying into the system.

You talk about this being anti-business. On the contrary, I would say this is very pro business. This ensures that those companies that have chosen to pay their fair share when it comes to worker safety insurance benefit premiums are not put at a competitive disadvantage by those who choose not to pay their share. This is as pro-business a piece of legislation as I've seen in this House.

I owned a small business. I come from both sides of the fence, in that my father was a very staunch trade unionist. I knew what put bread and butter on the Flynns' table, and that was job security from a trade union position that my father held. My choice in life, however, was to run a small business. I know how hard it is to operate in an environment where there appear to be escalating costs and increasing taxes, but I know as a small business person that you have a responsibility to contribute to the betterment of your society. You have a responsibility to pay your fair share when it comes to the provision of public services in the society within which you operate. This certainly is an example of where that can be made to be the case in the province of Ontario.

What we're asking is that over the next four years, between now and 2012, a decision be made in the very near future that would allow by 2012 for that situation to evolve here in this province in a reasonable and economical way. I don't think that's a lot to ask. In fact, I think that's something that it's imperative that we ask, that we debate, that we move to the public on and we make a decision on. As I said, I respect the opinions of the other members across the floor, but it certainly is a choice. Are you going to make your decision in support of those Ontario companies?

Let me give you some spokespeople from business. Let's look at Doug Chalmers, director of Aluma Systems in Sarnia, Ontario, and past chair of the Sarnia Construction Association: "Congratulations. Absolutely bril-

liant. This will make Ontario a safer workplace and improve the quality of life for all of us.” Ian Cunningham, who lives in Oakville and is president of the Council of Ontario Construction Associations: “This is a timely issue as the construction industry is actively seeking to proactively improve workplace safety across the industry and address the often thorny issue of coverage for independent operators.”

The party across the floor purports to be in favour of business. They’re in favour of some, but they’re not necessarily the sort of businesses that we look to in this province as being examples of businesses that pay their share. It’s time that they pony up to the plate. It’s time that they come clean with the people in the province of Ontario and tell those honest businesses that are paying their fair share whether they support them or not. From what I’m hearing today, they do not support honest businesses in the province of Ontario, and that is a shame. That is something I think that party should be ashamed of.

Derek Smith, London and District Construction Association, said, “This legislation will provide for accountability from operators that may not currently be participating in WSIB. What’s more, an initiative such as this will result in levelling the market opportunities for our members as a whole.” Either you agree that that levelling is fair, or you don’t. This party agrees that it is fair and is prepared to move on it. All members in this House should be prepared to support it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I’m pleased to rise and make comments on Bill 119, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, which would extend mandatory workplace safety insurance coverage to independent operators, sole proprietors, partners in a partnership and executive officers of a corporation carrying on business in construction.

This is a time allocation motion. I want to start off by quoting a member from the Liberal benches because I think it clearly sets the tone of what it’s really about. The Minister of Public Safety, Rick Bartolucci, back in 2002 said: “I think it is fundamentally wrong and fundamentally undemocratic to have so limited a debate on significant pieces of legislation. I think it is an insult to the people of Ontario.”

Let’s throw in another one for good measure; I’ve got lots of them. Minister Caplan in 2002 said, “For viewers at home or in our galleries here, time allocation is just a fancy form of closing debate.”

Those two statements—and there are many, many more—lead each of us to believe that with respect to Bill 119, the Minister of Labour has neither the courage nor the ability to allow proper debate on the damage this will do to small businesses in Ontario.

Let’s talk about the real issues here. The real hard-working and committed business owners and their employees of Ontario keep our economy going even through the difficult times, difficult times that now include, for the first time ever, Ontario—

Interjection.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Exactly—being in the position of have-not status and Dalton McGuinty needing bailouts from places like Newfoundland and Labrador. They must be embarrassed over there.

This is a job-killing, small-business-killing policy. I have heard from dozens of businesses in my riding that say the bill will fill the WSIB bankrolls but do nothing to shut down the underground economy. As a matter of fact, and to the contrary, it’s suggested it will cause growth in the underground economy. They’re saying it, and I agree.

When questioned on the damage to small business, the Minister of Labour does his best to keep appearing sincere. He talks about the need to go after underground workers. Only a Liberal minister would put hard-working small business people in the same class as underground construction. That’s regrettable, and it’s simply unfair. The introduction of Bill 119 won’t help construction businesses across the province that are already struggling in these difficult economic times in Dalton McGuinty’s have-not Ontario.

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As is stated often but deserves repeating, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, which was here today, projects that mandatory WSIB coverage will cost each business owner \$11,000 per year. Is this the Dalton McGuinty government’s approach to alleviating red tape and regulation, and creating an environment that will stimulate economic activity? Is this a measure that helps hard-working people in a sector as large as construction, superimposing even greater costs of doing business? It’s going to jeopardize the future of thousands of small business owners and workers, many of whom will have no other choice but to close down the shop.

Yet the Minister of Labour feels so compelled to avoid scrutiny and increase the demands on small business that he has decided to put a closure motion on debate in this Legislature. He has decided it is more important to his political future to stifle the voices of the very people this legislation negatively affects. It’s beyond cowardly; it’s plain abusive.

As Minister Caplan said when he was talking about closure on legislation—I quote another one from him: “That leads me to conclude that the government is afraid to debate this bill and the government is afraid to debate amendments.” It’s not easy to say, but in this case I have to agree with him: The Liberal government is afraid to debate Bill 119 and afraid to debate amendments to Bill 119.

I suggest that even though Minister Fonseca has nine or 10 staff in his office who are so-called advisers, the direction he is following comes from the unions, such as the international brotherhood, and the Working Families coalition. I suppose this is a minister who feels compelled, or is being told, to bow to their wishes in order to keep the Liberal coffers filled, bowing to big union pressure and cash-waving on the backs of small business, would-be apprentices and skilled trades workers. We’ve

had lots of them, over the months, protesting this government, and now this piece of legislation.

This legislation will not level the playing field, as was claimed. On the contrary, it will favour large construction firms and unionized workers at the expense of independent operators who are struggling to find work as it is. Now is certainly not the time to raise the cost of working in this field. Businesses in Ontario already have the highest taxes in North America and are buried in red tape, and now the minister is dealing them a final blow.

My colleagues and I have received numerous e-mails, calls and letters from constituents expressing their outrage at the government's proposal, and I know that Liberal members have also received similar contacts. Maybe they're not reading them in the Legislature, but they've got the e-mails. They're aware that instituting mandatory WSIB coverage will not deter others from cheating the system.

A small business that is going to drastically suffer as a result of Bill 119 writes to me, saying: "This legislation does not recognize the contribution of legitimate small business to our economy; in fact, it only punishes us. We compete with a shop which provides the same service we do, under the table. What is our motivation to continue to operate legally?"

I hope the Liberal government is going to listen to the fears of these people and finally join the PCs in fighting for those who are struggling. Bill 119 clearly offers no incentive for independent operators. It will only harm their operations and weaken the economy of the province.

In my riding, Deborah and Del Sharp, from Haliburton county, have owned and operated Sharp Electric in Algonquin Highlands for 31 years. They look after the safety and security of their staff. They have insurance that provides coverage beyond the hours at work; it's 24 hours for their workers. They already have insurance for their workers that includes a drug plan and long-term disability. How dare the minister, for one instant, refer to these people as a class of underground construction.

They have said: "We obviously need to get this legislation stopped. We pay so much already in WSIB coverage that only protects the workers during the time on the job.

"We have a health plan which we pay for our employees which helps with drug costs and hospital times as well as a bit of life insurance and LTD.

"When we use this coverage there are no repercussions, as in higher fees, and this coverage follows our employees wherever they are, 24/7.

"WSIB penalizes us every time we submit a claim. It takes seven years of penalty fees to get rid of them. We pay a few times over for each and every claim we make. As owners of the company, we will never claim WSIB."

I know that the Minister of Labour wishes to reform the construction industry's insurance system. He should take the advice of Sharp Electric, which insists that the legislation "not be rushed, that committee hearings be

held around the province, and that other options to mandatory coverage be fairly considered."

I want to read one e-mail that the Minister of Small Business and the Minister of Labour have gotten—it appears that they only go to the sheets they want to read on the e-mails. It says: "This is to express my outrage that despite voting Liberal in the last election, I find the government I supported is rushing forward with a plan that will not only cost me money, but will give me no benefits and open the system to even more widespread abuse than it already has.

"This increase in the breadth of WSIB requirements is very poorly thought out, obviously by someone who has no experience in dealing with WSIB at the ground level.

"My faith in your position in the portfolio is trashed."

You have got that e-mail. Maybe you'd like to read that in the Legislature sometime.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate? The member for Hamilton East.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Centre, Mr. Speaker, the centre of Hamilton, the centre of our universe in the Hamilton community. Speaker, thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to say a few words, I guess technically on the time allocation motion that the government brought forward. I really am a little bit disappointed, because I was scheduled to speak on this bill I believe yesterday morning, when in fact for the first time the government used their opportunity to shut down debate after six and a half hours. I had a whole 20-minute speech, and now I have to squeeze it into five minutes. But I'm going to try because there's a lot of work that has been done here to start moving the yardsticks in terms of workers' compensation in the province of Ontario, so in fact I laud the government moving the yardsticks in terms of the workers being covered.

People in this chamber who have been here for some time may know that there was a study done—it was commissioned by the Conservative government. A report was issued called the Brock Smith report, and that report very clearly indicates in its recommendations—again, this report was not commissioned by the current government; it was commissioned by the previous government. It wasn't commissioned by the Ontario Building and Construction Trades Council; it was commissioned by the government. It was a report that was issued by a fellow named Brock Smith, who was in fact a Conservative. In his recommendations, he was very clear that the government of Ontario should move to cover all workers in the province of Ontario in the workers' compensation system, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act.

The people who are watching today might be interested to know that about 30% of workers in Ontario are currently not covered by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act. This bill that the Liberals are bringing forward, I believe it's Bill 119, is one that will begin to move those yardsticks. It will bring some more workers under the protection of the workers' compensation system in case they're injured at work.

I wanted to make sure that I brought to the table kudos not only to the Ontario Building and Construction Trades Council through the leadership of Pat Dillon but also, of course, to my own local building trades. From the staff perspective, Mr. Joe Beattie works very hard with the building trades in Hamilton, and I've met with them many, many times. They are very pleased, but there are concerns that they have, and they're concerns that are shared by New Democrats.

There are concerns around the implementation time frame for this legislation. If we believe, if we agree here in Ontario that workers who are injured on the job should be covered in the construction trades by workers' compensation, then they should be covered immediately. They should be covered right away. There should be no waiting period until 2012. You figure it takes a while for a bill to go through the process, to get royal assent, to set up the structures to bring these workers into the fold, but holy smokes, 2012. Where is the real commitment to these workers if we're going to delay their right to be able to claim compensation for injuries on the job, if we're not going to allow them to be covered until 2012? That's one of our concerns.

Another concern, of course, is the exemptions in this legislation, particularly around construction in the home-building sector. The home-renovation sector is something that's exempted. We're looking forward to this bill getting into committee so that we can talk to the government about possibly making some amendments, particularly around exemptions, but also around the time frame for implementation, which is extremely slow and, from my perspective, an injustice to workers.

1710

Speaking about justice for workers, there is a group of workers who have been fighting workers' compensation issues in this province for a very long time. It's called the Ontario Network of Injured Workers Groups, and there are individual injured workers' groups in many communities. The Ontario network is led by a fellow named Peter Page, who in fact is the president of the injured workers' group in my own city of Hamilton. As well, in that organization, from the provincial perspective, is someone named Steve Mantis, who comes out of Thunder Bay. Steve has been very active in his own community as well on injured workers' issues. And Karl Crevar, of course, is another fellow from Hamilton who has done great work on injured workers' issues.

Let's not pretend that the workers' compensation system is the be-all and end-all; it has some serious problems. But in this particular situation, we're not talking about the problems with the system, we're talking about bringing more workers under the coverage of the no-fault—more or less—insurance system that workers' compensation is.

The 30% of workers that are still not covered, we need to address them. Those are workers who are often in the financial districts and the banks. I met a woman who is a teacher at a private school—you might not know this—and they're not covered by workers' compensation. Her

name is Mary, and she's fighting to get more workers covered by WSIB.

So I would ask the minister if he could please look at expanding this to all workers. But certainly New Democrats support this move, as it does move to bring more workers into the coverage of the WSIB.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I do want to get a few words on the record this afternoon speaking on the time allocation motion, Bill 119. It's interesting, I listened very carefully to the words from across the aisle, and I just wanted to make a couple of comments about time allocation.

We know for a fact, as a former municipal councillor, we had Al Leach, who was the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Some referred to him as a bit of a bus jockey. But when he was the minister, he brought in that famous omnibus bill that changed legislation for a whole variety of ministries in this place, started the downloading to municipalities in the province—and there were no public hearings on that one. Some have said that that was the start of the who-got-done-in committee and, frankly, last Friday, of course, we made the announcement for the upload. So I want to get that one on the record.

Also, I remember the social contract legislation from the Rae days. There was a piece of legislation that had no public hearings. I remember as a councillor in Peterborough talking to the leadership of CUPE Local 524, who were the outside workers of the city of Peterborough, and Local 526, who were the inside workers of Peterborough. They were just devastated when the social contract was brought in and they didn't even have a chance to provide any input. As a matter of fact, every public union contract in Ontario—just like that, thrown right out the door.

Interjection.

Mr. Jeff Leal: And no public hearings.

I also want to correct the historical record. The member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock was talking about equalization. I want to refer to an editorial that appeared in today's Peterborough Examiner that talked about equalization. It said, "Ontario will get \$347 million in equalization pay, but next year, because its economy has faltered at the same time record oil"—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Peterborough, you are well aware that the standing orders require that you speak to the motion that's on the floor. Please do.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Thanks so much, Mr. Speaker. I was somewhat provoked by the official opposition, but I will get back to the bill.

One of the key issues of this bill is something that I faced as a city councillor. I remember when we had roofing tenders in the city of Peterborough. We would have tenders submitted by a wide variety of contractors. Inevitably, what would happen is that there would be a contractor that didn't pay WSIB premiums who would lowball their tender to get the contract. After the contract was awarded, I would have people come and see me as a

city councillor, pointing out to me, in very clear terms, that the reason they lost the contract was because they were low-balled by people not paying WSIB. So one positive aspect of this bill will be to correct that situation.

In fact, I know a company—my good friend, Currie Plumptre, the roofer, does outstanding work. In fact, about four years ago, between Christmas and New Year's, Currie was up on the roof because we had a leak. We had to replace our whole roof. Currie had the crew up there and did a tremendous job in putting a new roof on our home. In fact, Currie has Plumptre Roofing Second Generation in Peterborough. He has a great reputation for providing high-quality work, lots of jobs for his roofers. In fact—

Interjections.

Mr. Jeff Leal: That's right, the sky's the limit. In fact, he has a wonderful reputation, providing a lot of quality roofs in the city of Peterborough, not only for residents but for businesses getting rid of those flat roofs that inevitably leak. He has been very successful. We want to give those kind of reputable contractors a real opportunity to secure a lot of government work replacing those roofs for the citizens of Peterborough.

I hope there will be an opportunity, as this bill moves forward, perhaps for some committee hearings, an opportunity to look at some areas that perhaps need to be adjusted somewhat. I know the Minister of Labour extremely well—a very sensitive, hard-working minister. He will have his ear to the ground over the next little while listening to what people have to say about this bill. Indeed, an opportunity to perhaps bring in some amendments will be very helpful.

Interjections.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I hear the chattering from across the aisle. I don't want to have to do that social contract rip-up again that they were so famous for. In fact, Mr. Speaker, as you know very well, in 1995, between January and June, the NDP government didn't even meet in the House. Talk about hijacking Parliament. They didn't even bother to come in and meet. In fact, we know that the member for Kenora—Rainy River was rubber-stamping everything that the Rae government was doing. So we know their record when it comes to accountability in this Parliament.

We do look forward to having some hearings on this bill and an opportunity—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Gentlemen and ladies, I can't even hear the speaker. So please pay attention to the person who has the floor.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I just have a few seconds to wind up. Obviously, we've got under the skin of the third party over there by providing the historical record of the Rae government; some of those associates are still sitting over there. We look forward to this bill moving forward in committee—an opportunity to hear from contractors across Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a pleasure to participate in the time allocation motion. It's quite striking that this motion—if you look at it, it's kind of pre-empting democracy.

What is the game plan here? That's the real story. From our research, we have found that aside from the minister and his parliamentary assistant, Mr. Dhillon, only Khalil Ramal has debated this bill.

Mr. Tim Hudak: What? Only one Liberal?

Mr. John O'Toole: Only one Liberal took the time to debate. Obviously, they have been silenced. Furthermore, the sophisticated comment by the PA amounted to 460 words, all carefully scripted for him by the minister.

Let's look at the history here. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business did a survey prior to the 2007 election to get an honest response from the leaders about what they would do in certain circumstances. There were four or five categories where they questioned small business, and then they did a survey review with the leaders of the Liberal Party, the NDP and the Conservative Party. One of the categories of that survey dealt with this very issue, "What do you expect to find?" and the response by the Liberal leader, Mr. McGuinty.

Mr. Tim Hudak: He must have said he was going to do it.

Mr. John O'Toole: Wait a minute here. With your indulgence, a bit of history is always good. We learn from history.

1720

Question number 13, the question to Premier McGuinty: "Will you refrain from expanding mandatory WSIB coverage in sectors that are currently covered to include executive officers and directors?" What does this bill do? Exactly that. But what did they say? "We will work with the stakeholders in the small business community." And then they'll whack them.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Did they say that?

Mr. John O'Toole: No, this is what they're doing. Actions speak louder than words.

Question number 14: "Will you, Mr. McGuinty"—it would have been Mr. McGuinty at the time, because it was an election, so he wasn't really the Premier—"refrain from expanding mandatory WSIB coverage in sectors that are currently covered to include independent operators?" What does this bill do? Exactly that, and it's specific.

The general theme here for some time, we will all admit, was to work honestly as partners with CFIB, and most ministers of all stripes have done just that.

Just recently, in response to Bill 160, I received many letters from my constituents, small business people, but more importantly a letter from Judith Andrew, who's the vice-president of the CFIB—and I commend Ms. Andrew as well as Satinder Chera for the work they do representing small business—to the minister, after they had met face to face. This is a really exposing letter. I will send it to anyone who requests it.

"Dear Mr. Fonseca,

"In our long experience, we have dealt with legislators who put forward seriously misguided policies. The WSIB mandatory coverage legislation you tabled today falls squarely in that category. It will not level the playing field; on the contrary, it will tilt it in favour of large" organizations. "It will fail to get at the underground economy; present lawbreakers will no doubt evade the new law, and dive deeper underground...."

"What is unprecedented about your actions today is the level of betrayal of small and medium-size business. Your government's commitment to review a 'named-insured'"—in the survey I mentioned earlier—"approach to catching cheaters was not fulfilled"—broken promise—"even though it was engineered to falter, it wasn't concluded. Your failure to consult with CFIB, to even await your first meeting with us, before announcing your intentions can only be described as incredibly poor form. Your pleasant phone message indicating that as a brand new minister you wanted to work with CFIB, belied your involvement in making a secret deal on mandatory coverage with construction unionists"—Pat Dillon—"as if removing democratic votes for union certification wasn't enough). Springing this terrible announcement on hard-working small business people"—especially and most insulting—"during Small Business Month, at a time when the economic outlook is shaky, is incredibly insensitive. Your seemingly cocky, uncaring attitude to the 25,000 action alerts we delivered from our members was distressing. And, we see it as, frankly, dishonest, that you equivocated, as recently as last Thursday, concerning your schedule for introduction and passage of the legislation."

This is a testimony of working with small business. It's nothing but a sham, and it's a shame. This is going to cost small business across Ontario, in your riding, Mr. Ramal, as well as the ridings of all the members, \$11,000 for each small business—and the participation level has not been there.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Vic Dhillon: I just want to start by stating what the spirit of this bill is about. This bill is about taking steps to promote health and safety in the Ontario construction industry by proposing to extend Workplace Safety and Insurance Act coverage to categories of individuals working in construction currently not covered. This bill is about the health and safety of Ontario workers, which is our number one priority. It's about extending WSIA coverage to more individuals in the construction industry, which will help fight the underground economy. The underground economic practices threaten health and safety, undermine labour standards and erode construction quality. It also puts employers who play by the rules at a competitive disadvantage. It is the right time to act to help protect legitimate construction employers from unfair competition from the underground economy.

I just want to read some testimonials that we've received from many leaders across Ontario. There's one

here from Derek Smith of the London and District Construction Association. He says, "This legislation will provide for accountability from operators that may not currently be participating in WSIB. What's more, an initiative such as this will result in levelling the market opportunities for our members as a whole."

Another one from Andrew Sefton, executive director of the Ontario Painting Contractors Association: "Not only has the recent announcement shown that the Ministry of Labour supports the most economical insurance option available for the construction industry, the Ministry of Labour has embraced the notion that the construction industry should aspire to be the highest common denominator from which all society shall benefit."

I also want to mention that there were concerns raised about workers having private insurance. Well, WSIB is more than that, because it provides individuals working in construction with access to health and safety education and training resources and helps them with other health and safety issues. I want to mention that private insurance does not offer the comprehensive package of benefits and safeguards that the WSIB coverage does.

The WSIB coverage includes a sophisticated prevention component, return-to-work training and other services which are provided by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board. Private insurance companies do not provide that.

The WSIB coverage will mean compensation for loss of earnings at 85% of pre-injury net earnings, payment of all health care costs, including services not covered by OHIP, non-economic loss awards for permanent injuries, compensation for loss of retirement income at age 65 and many, many other benefits that private insurance does not provide.

Also, I mentioned that this will help to combat the underground economy in our construction industry. The underground economy is a serious problem in Ontario's construction industry. The underground economy in construction can be stemmed in part by creating arrangements that result in underground operators registering within a system. This proposal requires those who engage individuals to perform construction work to ensure that these individuals are registered with the WSIB before work begins.

Establishing a mandatory coverage system would help level the playing field for law-abiding construction companies that comply with the WSIB and other legislative requirements.

The WSIB insurance is paid through premiums levied by the WSIB in accordance with the Workplace Health and Safety Act. There are many benefits that would be provided through this proposal. More individuals working in construction will have access to health and safety education and the training resources of organizations funded by the WSIB, and compliance with health and safety standards on those work sites can be improved.

The proposal would help level the playing field in construction so that companies registered with the WSIB

and complying with other legislation will be able to compete more effectively. The proposal would help reduce revenue leakage for the WSIB where WSIB benefits and services are provided to individuals for whom no premiums have been paid by the principal or the employer.

It's about safety. It's about better, more ethical work practices by the sole operators who haven't paid their fair share into the system. I think it's the right time to have them pay their fair share so that the whole economy benefits, so that construction workers who leave their families to go to work in the morning can come back home safely. So it's about safety, it's about fairness, it's about levelling the playing field.

I thank you very much for this opportunity.

1730

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Colle: I'm going to wrap this up.

Just about the time allocation motion, I sat on that side of the House, and I remember when previous governments undertook quite a systemic approach to the time allocation, so I find it a bit difficult to hear the members of the Conservative Party going on at length. I think there's room for criticism every time there's a time allocation motion; that's fair game. I don't deny anybody's right to question time allocation motions. I think they're legitimate comments, but I don't think they're that legitimate when they come from the Conservatives, because if you sat through those eight years, you know that what they did to this House was quite extraordinary.

Anyway, I just want to say that the essence of this bill that we're talking about time allocating is about the protection of workers. It's not often enough that we remember the men and women in this province who gave their best years working in construction and basically have suffered because of it. There are many people in my riding who walk with canes, who are wheelchair-bound, who are unable to pick up their grandkids, because they worked on construction and were injured on that job. It's quite a common sight to see.

When we're talking in esoteric terms about legislation, to me we're talking about real people who need protection from a system in Ontario, that gives everybody a level of protection they need. Because sooner or later there is going to be an accident, considering the volatility of that kind of work. So the laissez-faire attitude that the Conservatives have about this bill is not enough to protect those 90,000 families who are not protected right now; if the breadwinner gets hurt on the job, there is no assurance that they will be protected. Either their wages or their medical remedies will not be adequate to get them back to work. That impacts on those families; it impacts on, obviously, the career future of those workers. So, by having proper coverage under the WSIB, we are taking care of people who are in vulnerable situations.

This bill just deals with the construction sector. It even exempts the mom-and-poppers who do work in resi-

dential repairs. It's just dealing with the construction industry. It's not involved with home renovations, etc.

So, it is a step in the right direction.

Many members here know that this has been talked about—I can remember this being talked about when Tony Grande, in my own riding, was working on this file back in the 1970s. The late Tony Grande, who was a member of the New Democratic Party—and I had a lot of respect for him—dealt with this for many, many years, and I know that member Tony Lupusella worked on this file going back to the 1970s. So it's not as if this is anything new.

All it does is it asks the Legislature to offer some protection to this greater-risk pool, and that's what we're doing. It's not anything more than security for the workers who are in vulnerable situations working on construction.

Construction is a significant part of the Ontario economy. We talk about the auto manufacturing industry, we talk about tourism, but one of the areas that really provides a lot of food on the table in Ontario is construction. So, by protecting the workers, we're protecting an industry, and that's why this bill is needed.

I know sometimes members of the opposition sort of relish the fact—almost with glee they're saying, "Ontario is last," as if they're happy about it. They're bashing the Ontario economy; they're bashing Ontario. What they're doing is, they're basically also bashing the men and women who need these jobs. If you talk down Ontario, if you talk down Ontario workers, you're not going to help them get a job. If a guy has to sell a car and you're talking down the Ontario economy, you're not going to help that salesman sell something. If we can't talk up Ontario, the people in Newfoundland aren't going to talk up Ontario. So this constant revelling and saying, "Well, Ontario is last; Ontario is now a have-not province," that helps nothing.

Sure, there are incredible challenges and criticisms that are relevant that should be made, but day after day, when people are attacking Ontario—when we're attacking Ontario, we're attacking the hard-working people in Huron-Bruce, in Goderich, in Welland, in Guelph, in Oakville, in Scarborough. So when you're dumbing down Ontario and bashing Ontario and saying, "You're last," it's like saying that the workers in Cambridge or the workers in Leamington are not up to it. That's absolutely false.

We have incredible challenges, but name me a country in the world that doesn't have the challenges that we have. We're all going through this. This bill relates to the fact that we value our workers; we're trying to protect them. It's not going to solve all the problems in construction. But to say here that this is the end of small business and to say that this is another nail in the coffin, that's absolutely false. This is about saying, "We value Ontario workers, we want to make sure they're safe, and if they get hurt, we'll protect them."

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The time for debate has expired. Ms. Smith has moved government notice of motion number 89. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1737 to 1747.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): All those in favour, rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura
Balkissoon, Bas
Brotten, Laurel C.
Brown, Michael A.
Brownell, Jim
Caplan, David
Colle, Mike
Dhillon, Vic
Dombrowsky, Leona
Duguid, Brad
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Fonseca, Peter
Gerretsen, John

Gravelle, Michael
Hoy, Pat
Jaczek, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Kular, Kuldip
Leal, Jeff
Mangat, Amrit
Mauro, Bill
McNeely, Phil
Milloy, John
Mitchell, Carol
Naqvi, Yasir
Oraziatti, David

Pendergast, Leeanna
Pupatello, Sandra
Qaadri, Shafiq
Ramal, Khalil
Rinaldi, Lou
Sandals, Liz
Sergio, Mario
Smith, Monique
Sousa, Charles
Van Bommel, Maria
Wilkinson, John
Wynne, Kathleen O.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted
Bisson, Gilles
Gélinas, France
Hudak, Tim
Jones, Sylvia
Kormos, Peter

Martiniuk, Gerry
Miller, Norm
Miller, Paul
Munro, Julia
O'Toole, John
Prue, Michael

Savoline, Joyce
Scott, Laurie
Tabuns, Peter
Yakabuski, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 38; the nays are 16.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Orders of the day.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move adjournment of the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The House adjourned at 1750.

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Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Steve Peters

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

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Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Arthurs, Wayne (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Simcoe–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
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Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (LIB)	London West / London-Ouest	
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / Ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Broten, Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Brown, Michael A. (LIB)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development / Ministre du Développement économique Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Carroll, Hon. / L'hon. M. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	Minister of Culture / Ministre de la Culture Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (LIB)	Essex	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
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Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances Minister of Revenue / Ministre du Revenu

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
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Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby-Oshawa	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (LIB)	Mississauga East-Cooksville / Mississauga-Est-Cooksville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay-Superior North / Thunder Bay-Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora-Rainy River	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Hoy, Pat (LIB)	Chatham-Kent-Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West-Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest-Glanbrook	
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges-Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (LIB)	Brampton-Springdale	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin-Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket-Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (NDP)	Welland	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Kular, Kuldip (LIB)	Bramalea-Gore-Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (LIB)	Glengarry-Prescott-Russell	
Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean-Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga-Brampton South / Mississauga-Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity-Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay-Atikokan	
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough- Westdale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa-Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa-Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound-Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East-Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est-Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Carol (LIB)	Huron-Bruce	
Moridi, Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	
Munro, Julia (PC)	York-Simcoe	
Murdoch, Bill (IND)	Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound	
Naqvi, Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Oraziotti, David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pendergast, Leeanne (LIB)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (LIB)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (LIB)	Scarborough—Agincourt	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres
		Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches—East York	Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de parti reconnu
Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of International Trade and Investment / Ministre du Commerce international et de l'Investissement
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Ramal, Khalil (LIB)	London—Fanshawe	
Ramsay, David (LIB)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland—Quinte West	
Runciman, Robert W. (PC)	Leeds—Grenville	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Ruprecht, Tony (LIB)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Monique M. (LIB)	Nipissing	Minister of Tourism / Ministre du Tourisme
		Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Deputy Premier / Vice-premier ministre
		Minister of Energy and Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Énergie et de l'Infrastructure
Sorbara, Greg (LIB)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton—Mississippi Mills	
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga—Erindale	Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services / Ministre des Petites Entreprises et des Services aux consommateurs
Van Bommel, Maria (LIB)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	
Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (LIB)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Wilkinson, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Perth—Wellington	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
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		Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Zimmer, David (LIB)	Willowdale	

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Phil McNeely, John O'Toole
Lou Rinaldi
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

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Legislative Assembly of Ontario

First Session, 39th Parliament

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Thursday 6 November 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

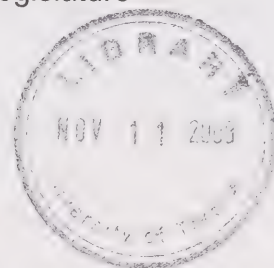
Première session, 39^e législature

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Jeudi 6 novembre 2008

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Greffière
Deborah Deller



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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 6 November 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 6 novembre 2008

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a Buddhist prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA SÉCURITÉ PROFESSIONNELLE ET L'ASSURANCE CONTRE LES ACCIDENTS DU TRAVAIL

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 4, 2008, on the motion for second reading of Bill 119, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 / Projet de loi 119, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to the order of the House dated November 5, I am now required to put the question.

Mr. Fonseca has moved second reading of Bill 119. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

The recorded vote is deferred until after question period today.

Second reading vote deferred.

PHOTO CARD ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LES CARTES-PHOTO

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 5, 2008, on the motion for third reading of Bill 85, An Act to permit the issuance of photo cards to residents of Ontario and to make complementary amendments to the Highway Traffic Act / Projet de loi 85, Loi permettant la délivrance de cartes-photo aux résidents de l'Ontario et apportant des modifications complémentaires au Code de la route.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate? The member for Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the earlier acknowledgement, but our critic, Frank Klees, has said to me to continue to press for a review and some strengthening on Bill 85. My last remarks yesterday, at the end of this, were talking about what the bill does and what it doesn't do. Bill 85 is An Act to permit the issuance of photo cards to residents of Ontario and to make complementary amendments to the Highway Traffic Act. Now, what this does—Mr. Speaker, I would like to call a quorum.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is a quorum present?

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member for Durham has the floor.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you, Speaker. What Bill 85 does, if you get an enhanced card, one of the three cards—there's a basic, an enhanced and a combination, which would be a driver's licence with the enhanced features on it. That card would allow you to cross into the United States by land or sea, but it would not allow you to travel into the United States by air; you'd still need a passport.

The other part that I'm still wondering about is that if you wanted to encourage freedom around the border a bit, unrestrained access, there's a Nexus card, which I don't know a lot about, but the Nexus card is used by people who are frequent flyers, people who cross the border, I gather, Americans going into Canada or Canadians into the United States. If that could not have been a solution that's already in place to some extent and strengthened—I wonder if that option was examined. But more importantly, we do want the solution on the American side—you understand?—for Americans to have a much more convenient way to get into Canada, so they can go to Stratford, to Niagara-on-the Lake, to Durham region—to go to Jungle Cat World, as well as the wonderful museums and archives that we have in my riding of Durham.

I would only say this: The bill is a good step; we agree with that. We expressed our concerns on the issue of the privacy of information and we talked about the technology implications and we didn't get a very clear answer on the cost of implementation.

I guess the other thing that really comes up when you're in this discussion is that we're discussing a bill

that we generally are going to support—we tried to move amendments—but here's the deal: This morning Bill 114 is before the finance committee, and that is a very important and significant bill.

Mr. Bob Delaney: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Bill 114 would apparently have nothing to do with the matter under discussion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member for Durham, you have the floor.

Mr. John O'Toole: What I was trying to establish is the significant content of Bill 114 versus Bill 85. That was the point, and that's an appropriate comparison, for the public to understand that here we are discussing a bill, basically using time in this august place, when it could be more importantly spent on Bill 119, which has just been time-allocated. Look, Bill 114 has a lot of content that affects my riding; I'd prefer to talk about that. Bill 119 is about small business; I'd prefer to talk about that. Yet here I am, I'm required to speak on Bill 85. Bill 85 is an act that institutes some more red tape, technically. Do you know what I mean?

If you want to get down to it, we asked a question: How much is this new secure photo card going to cost? Mr. Brown, the parliamentary assistant, gave the answer, which I thought was polite—at least we got an answer; usually we don't—but I don't really trust the answer.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: Look, it's a matter of trust here. I can only go on the history. If history is any way of predicting the future, then they break a lot of promises; that's all I'm saying. He said that the cost of this new licence would be less than the current one. I question that. Then I went on to say, "Look, what is this face recognition or the software and hardware required to put this in place to receive all these new applications?" Again, there are three types of cards: There's the basic one, there's the next one and then there's the enhanced one. I think we're going to have some clerk there with some files—maybe they're going to be different colours. Who's going to receive the information? It can't be done on Service Ontario, online, because you have to verify that the picture is actually the member from Halton, Mr. Chudleigh. There's his picture; we're going to put that in the system, and he's going to disclose certain information to them. Hopefully, it will all be honest. I'd expect it would be, knowing Mr. Chudleigh's history.

0910

I would say, though, that I do have every understanding that we were compelled to come up with some solution. This really doesn't come into force until June 2009. What's missing here is a really unilateral agreement from the United States to agree with our solution. What if they cause a problem with that? They're going to have to be able to read the card when it's presented.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: Well, some people are saying Barack Obama—President-elect Obama—is going to solve this, among all the problems. The messiah has arrived.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: And hey, I hope it is, because he was elected on the vision of hope. He's a leader with vision and hope, and that's what's missing in this government: a leader with vision and hope.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm only responding to Mr. Colle, who used to be in cabinet, and two or three other cabinet ministers here.

But we are missing right here, today, leadership with hope, because you're the government and the economy is going south. Just read the TD Bank—this government is in trouble.

Bill 85 doesn't do a lot to solve that problem. What it does is allow us to get into the States more easily, but it doesn't allow the Americans to come into Canada more easily. That is a worthy question. It's on the record now, and I'm raising that issue in the limited time I've been given.

I really think, though, that perhaps Mr. Chudleigh would like to add a few comments on this because there's 15 minutes here that—

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: You're running out of time.

Mr. John O'Toole: No, I'm not running out of time; I'm running out of ideas.

I think there is more to be said on this bill, and my own impression is that there are some bills here that are more interesting than others. This one here—there are a lot of very good notes here that I have found helpful—this is the bill itself, which I have tried to read into the record, almost all of it actually.

It may seem like a small, trivial bill, but it's one more thing where the devil is in the detail. There are really 27 sections to this bill. I read some that are really interesting, and this one here—any time I see in a Liberal bill "Collection and Disclosure of Information," I read that thoroughly. Do you know what collection is about? Money. It's like a tax. This is a new revenue generator.

If you want to look at it, it might solve the \$500-million deficit, which could easily have been solved. I said in a public meeting—I spoke during Small Business Week—that the \$500-million deficit could have been solved. In a \$100-billion budget, that's 0.5%." The Ministry of Transportation probably spills more paint than that.

There's got to be some waste in some ministries. Don't tell me there's no waste in government. For instance, look at how few people are here this morning; that's waste. Our small caucus is out focused on committee work—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. The honourable member knows we don't refer to absences in the House. They may be working hard in committee or in their offices.

Mr. John O'Toole: They are. I certainly can only speak—thank you for that intervention. I withdraw any implications there.

I know there are probably cabinet meetings and things going on, and that is important, but the fact is, I know our

members from our caucus who were here this morning to stand to force a vote on Bill 119, the time allocation motion, have gone off now to committee work, trying to hold the government's feet to the fire. There's money going out the door in this place that I think could have solved the deficit.

But here I am talking on Bill 85. Maybe some people have just tuned in who weren't here. Maybe I'll go through and introduce a bit more of this.

The explanatory notes are—it's a 20-page bill. It's bilingual, so it's really 10 pages long. That's fairly significant. It's small, 8-point print, I think. It says here:

"There are three kinds of photo cards: basic, enhanced and combined. A basic photo card contains the holder's name and photograph and other prescribed information about the holder. An enhanced photo card contains the holder's name and photograph, a notation to indicate that the holder is a Canadian citizen, and other prescribed information about the holder; it also has security and other features that may allow it to be used for travel."

Whenever you say that "may" I like to see "shall". That's an affirmative word. This "may" is like we're hoping that Barack Obama agrees with us. That's not very strong. And we're spending all this time talking about it.

A combined photo card is one that constitutes the holder's photo, as described in the enhanced card, and it's on the driver's licence. That makes sense.

The other very important policy thing in this is that it is not mandatory. We talked about the mandatory portion because I can disclose that information—my citizenship and other things—or not. It's not mandatory—very important. But that's not really in this bill. What it says specifically in the statute is, "There is no obligation under this or any other act for an individual to have a photo card."

That's the slippery slope theory, technically. Because if 85% of the people see it's convenient to do it, some bureaucrat in their lofty chamber with expensive leather furniture and stuff like that will be saying, "Ah, 85% are doing it? Why don't we just make everybody do it?" They'll say, "Well, it's implied consent. The majority want it." So they'll force it. Then what have we got? We've got 13.5 million Ontarians with this data on them. The data itself then becomes a little tool to do some data profiling, to say how many people of different cultures, different languages and different ages. Now we start using this database as a marketing tool to say, "How do we get our messaging out on this so-and-so?" Data has value, and I don't like government to have too much of that data stuff. Stats Canada has enough of it on us. They start profiling stuff on people, and you combine that with their criminal record, or combine it with their other transactions going back and forth over the border, and pretty soon you could start to do a profile of a person that's going back and forth. You could see that they've had some traffic violations, and you could start to see that potentially they're bringing over the allowable limit all the time for alcohol or whatever it is. All I'm saying is

that this disclosure stuff is something that I'm glad to see. I want it firmly in the bill, that it's no obligation or pressure on people to do it.

Resolving disputes: Because of the important hearings on Bill 114 that are ongoing—soon-to-be truncated hearings; they're going to be an hour-and-a-half hearings. It's embarrassing. The amendments had to be in yesterday and they're having the hearings today. How sensible is that? Doesn't that sound a bit like they've got the cart before the horse? I don't know, it's a bit suspicious. We'll leave it at that because I'm trying to be polite today, and non-combative or confrontational, whatever. It's the gentler person that's here today, the gentler John O'Toole.

Anyway, in the limited time left I would like to get down to Bill 114 because my mayor, Jim Abernethy, and Nancy Taylor, as well as Dennis Hefferon, who's the legal counsel for the municipalities down there, are making a statement of great concern for my municipality, the community I live in—Bowmanville and Clarington generally. This affects their prosperity in the future. They've been nixed. They've been treated unfairly. I'm there to support and represent them, and I'll be sending a copy of Hansard to them. Mayor Abernethy is a new mayor and is doing quite a good job, not having been elected before. He has taken on a difficult task; we have challenges. But it should be on the record that Bill 85 won't directly affect them—I'm supposed to mention that, every once in a while, to stay on topic. Bill 85 is a bill we likely support.

0920

In the meantime, Bill 114 does affect them. It's a bill that I think should be brought back to this House to have a full discussion on the state of the economy, but they're not willing to do that. Our leader, John Tory, tried to have public hearings on it, and here we are, having hearings on things we don't need hearings on. Our leader, John Tory, is a person of integrity. He reminds me a lot of Barack Obama.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: He does. He's inclusive, consultative and visionary, and these are the qualities of hope. I don't see any hope in Ontario. Do you know what I see in Ontario? A deficit—and growing. I see an economy in terrible shape under the current leadership, blaming—with all due respect, the finance minister is out flailing his arms blaming Stephen Harper, blaming George Bush, blaming everyone, not focusing on the job at hand and getting the job done.

Now they're going to spend more money implementing Bill 85. Imagine the computers and facial recognition technology that has to be bought, the staff that have to review all these applications, the big file boxes for keeping all these records and original seals. Check section 20. There are going to be a lot of filing cabinets used. Section 20 says that all these records with the original signature are going to be kept. Imagine. There are going to be enough filing cabinets to take up some of the offices in this building.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Build a new building.

Mr. John O'Toole: A new building just to store a bunch of pictures—that's not very environmentally friendly.

It says right here in section 19, under records: "The Minister shall keep a record of every photo card that is issued, renewed or cancelled, and of every application"—holy smokes, they're going to keep the picture and the application—"made for a photo card and shall keep a record ... of each issuance, renewal, cancellation...."

Gee, I hope you don't have to renew it every week. What if people lose their hair and the picture doesn't match? Do you have to get a new one? There are some questions that aren't resolved on this. I think we need hearings on Bill 85.

With digital enhancement, I'm sure that some of the pictures will not be quite reflective of how the person actually looks, but we'll see that in the future. Not to trivialize Bill 85, I'm going to stop—there are almost six minutes left.

Applause.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you very much for that recognition—the member from Peterborough just walked in. With that, I have other, more important things to do. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I always find it informative to listen to my colleague when he raises these issues, because he has a style that I respect, in the sense that he likes to use some humour and bring facts together in a way that's not only entertaining but informative. I think he has raised some issues that, quite frankly, need to be listened to.

None of us in this House, I want to say up front, are opposed to the idea of having photo cards. I said at second reading, and I think the Conservatives took the same position at second reading, that indeed there is an argument to be made, that there are a lot of citizens in Ontario who lack photo identification because they don't have a driver's licence. That certainly is something we need to repair, because more and more you need to have photo identification for all kinds of reasons, everything from getting a library card to renting a movie. Many people, because they don't drive, don't have photo ID other than maybe their health card, and at times that's not acceptable.

We also said that we understand the need to move forward in trying to find ways to ease border congestion as people cross to the American side and back into Canada again. We, as New Democrats, understand it's not only an issue of making it more convenient for the individual but also an economic issue.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I would just say that I'll get a chance to speak to this more fully, but there are really grave concerns in regard to the privacy aspects of this bill, in regard to the information that's going to be collected, how that information is going to be stored, how it's going to be shared and what that means for the

privacy of individuals. I'll speak to that a little bit more fully.

I want to congratulate the member for what I thought was a good speech, that basically spoke to the points and, as always, was most entertaining.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Mr. Dave Levac: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this. I want to bring a little history into this.

When 9/11 happened, George W. Bush turned this into a must. Why? Because he switched the customs and immigration responsibility of the border crossings at Canada to homeland security. With the new creation of homeland security, they came in and introduced the WTI—what is it?

Mr. Bruce Crozier: Western hemisphere travel—

Mr. Dave Levac: WHTI.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: The initiative.

Mr. Dave Levac: The initiative.

I want to compliment the Minister of Transportation. At the time, he was the Minister of Tourism and brought to our attention that this was a very serious problem and we needed to work on it. He was actually mocked, he was ridiculed, he was criticized for taking on George Bush. He was one of the first ones to come forward in the country: not Stephen Harper; Jim Bradley. When Jim took this on, he tried to educate people and the other side was basically saying: "You're being silly. It's not going to happen. They'll do what they want to do. Get over it." Now we're debating that very same need from the very beginning.

I was on the executive committee of the CSG/ERC, which is the Council of State Governments/Eastern Regional Conference, and I was bringing him updates on the discussion of the very fact of this very bill, the fact that we needed to get photo IDs out there because we needed to make a harmonization of our capacity to bring the United States to us for tourism and our capacity to travel there and come back in again. I want to compliment the minister for bringing this forward, and also for the things that he's done in this bill; he's also had constant and continual information sessions with the Information and Privacy Commissioner, who has shepherded us along the way. All of that's happening.

Some of the things that people are talking about are the four separate products that don't demand you to take any single one. You've got the regular driver's licence, enhanced driver's licence, photo ID for non-drivers, which includes people who don't have sight, who don't drive; they love this bill—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Further questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I would like to congratulate the member for Durham, who spoke so eloquently on this bill, bringing out all the concerns that we have concerning this bill, and for giving up his duties in committee where his mayor and several members of the council are from Oshawa—or from Claremont, I think it is.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Clarington.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Clarington, and that's where he should be, with his people. He gave that up to finish a truncated speech, which is split—we seem to have more and more of those under the new House rules here that don't seem to take into consideration the flow of a speech. When it's interrupted like that, it loses a lot of its punch. In a speech, you tend to build a number of points until you come to a conclusion, and when it's truncated, you don't have that same flow. That's one of the problems of the new House rules we have around here, and Bill 85 had that happen to the member for Durham and that's unfortunate.

He did point out the fact that this new bill talks about three new photo ID cards. I have some of the same concerns and my constituents have expressed those concerns. Although it says they may be optional, the wording is not as strong as perhaps we would like to see in a bill such as this that would protect privacy and individual knowledge about people. This is traipsing along the edges of a very sensitive subject when people's most important and most private information is being subjected to this kind of—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Further questions and comments?

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Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thank you for giving me the chance to speak and comment on the member from the opposite side—

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Durham.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: The member for Durham. Thank you very much.

I was listening to him speak for almost 20 minutes. He spoke about many different elements. But the most important thing in this bill is to create security and put security in place, and to give options to people, many different options: if you want a photo card or enhancement card or a photo card without driving. All these elements are to protect our security.

As you know, it's very important to allow people to move between Canada and the United States. This issue has been brought to the House many different times, talking about how many people find it difficult to cross over to the United States without a passport or without any ID. So I think it's a very important step. I want to congratulate the Minister of Transportation for bringing forward this important element to this place, to allow the people of Ontario to move across the border without hesitation and without any problem.

I think the debate is going to continue, and I hope all the members from this House will support this bill, because it's very important for all of us: important for the drivers and important for the people who want to cross the border and cannot drive.

We have options, and it's not mandatory. I know the member opposite was criticizing the government because we didn't implement an enforcement mechanism to force all the people to have this card. We don't believe in enforcement in this House; we don't believe in dictatorship. We believe in democracy and allowing people to choose. This way, they have the choice, and I think that's a very

good element. Hopefully, at the end of the day, all of us will support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I just want to remind honourable members that when you're speaking, try and remember not to have your BlackBerries near the microphones. It's quite a jolt in the ears of our translators and our broadcast service people.

Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I didn't think it was a BlackBerry; I thought it was a moose walking by here. I was looking for Sarah Palin, actually, but that's a whole other line. I'm sorry, I had to take my shot; I saw the pictures.

I guess it would be appropriate, before starting this debate, to congratulate President-elect Obama. I want to say that because it relates to what we are going to be talking about in this debate. What has happened in the United States with a lot of people is one of those issues where it's a moment in history. The real challenge now will be, is he one of those leaders who finds his moment in time and recognizes the mandate that he's been given? He is inheriting, I think, some very tough issues that he's going to have to deal with, and this is not a partisan or non-partisan issue. The reality is, the American economy is in a shambles. There's the whole issue where the country is still not feeling secure when it comes to the issue of terrorism, and that relates to this bill.

What's going to be interesting is, will President-elect Obama continue down the road that President Bush has set with homeland security? Because clearly, the part that offends me about this entire process that we're going through—I don't mean this from a Liberal, NDP or Conservative perspective—is that our country has enjoyed for over a century, 130 years or whatever it is, since 1867, a unique relationship with the United States.

We have the longest undefended border in the world, and as citizens of the United States and Canada, we have been able to cross over each other's borders to visit, shop, exchange commercially and do all those things that we do as a civilized nation. It has never been an issue in Canada and never been an issue in the United States that we don't trust each other. The unfortunate part of what President Bush has done—and I understand why he did it, but it's very unfortunate—is that I think part of the message is that he doesn't and he didn't trust Canadians as much as maybe he should have.

We are a peaceful people. We, as Canadians, value our relationship with the United States. We have a unique relationship with the Americans. They're like the big brother. Sometimes we're a little bit envious and sometimes we're a little bit mad, but mostly we're glad, because we know that the United States shares a lot in common with Canada, and that in the end it is to our mutual advantage—economically, culturally and from a security point of view—that we maintain good relationships with each other.

I don't think there's a member in this House who is not related to somebody who's living in the United States today. My mother's sister is married to a gentleman in Philadelphia, Uncle Tom, and they've been living in

Philadelphia now for 50 years. In fact, my aunt, who's French, sounds more like an American than a French Canadian because of living there for all those years. Our relationship with that family is strong; they see Canada very positively, and we see the United States very positively. It's unfortunate that we, as a nation and as a province, find ourselves in a situation of having to react to what President Bush has set up.

Now, I say again, I understand the fear that Americans have when it comes to security because there's a lot, sometimes, to be fearful of. The Americans, as a large imperial power—and I think that's how people see them in many parts of the world—have got their thumbs, as they say, in various pots around the world and that has made a lot of people uncomfortable. As a result, they become a target. So the question becomes, how do they deal with making sure that the target is smaller and smaller and that people are not mad at them?

I hoped that President Bush would have learned something from the old colonial powers. The British, the French, the Germans, the Dutch, the Spanish and the Portuguese were all colonial powers at one time in the history of our world and they understood, after a while, that you cannot subjugate people and you cannot impose your views, your politics and your culture on other people because, in the end, people will do what they naturally do.

We look at India as an example. India was the crown jewel of the British Empire. For 300 years, I believe, they were under British rule and for all those 300 years, the people of India basically did what they did naturally and then they decided at one point that they wanted independence. The British understood, after the war, that it was not a good idea to stay there as an imperial power and that they had to transfer control back to India so that Indians and Pakistanis could determine for themselves what their country should look like.

What's interesting, after 300 years of colonial rule in India, is that the British were probably more affected, as far as learning from the Indians the wonderful things about their culture and their country, which they brought back to England. But the point is, England learned, France learned and other countries learned that you cannot be interfering in other people's lives when it comes to what happens within their own borders. Yes, we have to have good relationships. Yes, we have to be able to trade economically. Yes, we have to be able to share culturally and we have to be able to travel freely. Those are all important. And yes, we have economic interests and yes, we do have political interests, but once we take the view that we are trying to control, by way of might, what it is that's going on within those borders, you end up becoming a target. I think the British, the French and others learned over the years that economically they could not keep on doing that; it was bankrupting their countries and in the end, they would not be able to win hearts and minds. So they pulled out and they developed a whole new relationship with the world.

If you look at the Americans—and this is the part that I find quite sad. They are the largest power in the world,

but they're a great people. You look at what happened after the Second World War. The reaction of that administration under Truman was not to try to hold what military gains they had after the Second World War. Their approach was, how do we allow the Japanese and the Europeans to go back and do what they do best and build their own economies? And through what was called the—well, under Truman, the former Secretary of State for FDR—

Mr. Jeff Leal: Marshall.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The Marshall Plan, under what was the former Secretary of State. The Marshall Plan, under Truman, through his Secretary of State, took a very different approach. They said to the Japanese: "Go and do what you do best. Be proud to be Japanese. Build your own economy. Build your own democracy." And yes, the American military stayed there for some time, but they were not there as long as people would remember and the size of their military power in Japan was scaled back fairly quickly. As a result, Japan became one of the strongest economies in the world, it became one of the most secure democracies in the world, and we saw the same thing happen in Europe.

The part that I really have a hard time with is the reaction that President Bush had to 9/11. You needed to understand—it's unfortunate what happened, the thousands of lives that were lost on that tragic day certainly needed to be responded to in some way. But we didn't learn from the history of what had happened before. Instead, they tried to build up more military might around the world, such as we've seen in Iraq and Afghanistan, and to become much more paranoid within their own boundaries about how they protect citizens and how they protect themselves as a nation. We are unfortunately affected by that because now we're going through this whole debate in this Legislature about how we will react to what is an American agenda when it comes to how we cross the border one side to the other.

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I just want to say up front that I think it's rather sad that the President has responded in that way. With the election of President Obama, there may be a change of thought about how some of this would work. It would be nice to see us return to the relationship we had with our American friends, which was that we are two great nations, we share the principles of democracy, we're fiercely protective about our own culture and language, and we basically understand at the end of the day that we need to coexist and do it in a peaceful way. There's no threat from Canada and no threat from the United States when it comes to military intervention or to us trying to undermine the American government in any way. I would hope we don't have to do this type of legislation. Hopefully, President Obama, under his new administration, will see fit to try to resolve this issue from another perspective.

The issue we're dealing with in the House today, under Bill 85, is one that was originally started in the House of Commons. People might forget that after 9/11, the Department of Homeland Security set up the WHTI

as a way to figure out how to secure their borders. They asked the Canadian government to enter into some sort of system that would basically allow the Americans to more vigorously screen Canadians and others crossing from the Canadian side of the border into the United States.

When the federal government looked at this—I might be wrong, but I believe it started under the Liberal government and the previous federal minority Parliament also looked at it—they came to a very different conclusion than we did here in Ontario. They looked at it from the perspective of how much information they wanted to make available to people out there. They started to recognize that in Canada one of the things we hold very dear is our ability to protect information that people have on us. The whole issue of privacy is a principle within our society that's important. If I give my information to the driver's licence system in Ontario or to the federal passport system, that information is not shared among other people who don't need to see it.

One of the things the federal House quickly realized, as the Americans were making this request for us to have a streamlined process for them to be able to screen people going from Canada into the United States and toughening up the borders, was that if we started doing what they asked, which was to start linking our databases together in such a way that the border security people, as we cross the border, could find out a lot about us—the alarm bells rang federally. They understood that it was going to be an issue of people having more information about you than they needed to see. For example, currently, if I cross the border or go anywhere in the world, I have my passport. But my passport has limited information tied to it. It has a photo of me, it has information about who I am, the country I reside in, the address I live at, my date of birth, but they're not able to determine from my passport a whole bunch of other things in regard to information that other provincial or federal databases have. There is not a system that says, as you cross over, "Here is my credit information," through a passport or, "Here are my convictions," through a driver's licence. There is a whole bunch of information they are not able to access by way of a passport.

As I understand it, the way the passport system works internationally is that, yes, governments have ways of sharing a certain amount of information that sets a flag if you cross the border and use your passport. If I'm known to have a criminal conviction against me, there's a flag that is set. Then it makes the physical search important in regard to border security checking with the Canadian authorities: "We have this person. We have held him because it shows a flag that the person has a criminal charge that's pending against him." But the actual detailed information is not given to the people at border security, because those are issues of privacy. So the federal government decided, "No, we're not going to go down this road," because it becomes very dangerous when governments start to share information among various databases at the provincial and federal levels and make that information easily available, not only to border

security but to anybody else who can tamper with and hack into the database or read it through one of these RFIDs, which I'll talk about a little bit later.

Earlier, I heard one of the members get up and say he wanted to congratulate Mr. Bradley on leading the way. I'm not so sure that's something we should be thumping our chests about, to be quite blunt.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No, I've got to say I have great respect for Minister Bradley. I've served in this House for some 18 or 19 years, and he is a very honourable gentleman; I have nothing but respect for Mr. Bradley. But let's understand what's going on here: We're adopting a system that our federal Parliament would not adopt. Our federal government said, "We're not going to go this way because we already have a mechanism; it's called a passport." A far larger number of people in Canada have passports than any other nation, as compared to the United States. They took the position of, "We already have a passport and we need to come to some sort of other agreement, because once you start linking these databases together, it becomes dangerous."

Let me try to explain the problem that we have. Under this particular bill the provincial government, through, I imagine, the Ministry of Transportation, is going to collect information on these photo ID cards; it will either be an enhanced driver's licence or one of the enhanced photo ID cards. In that, they're going to be linking information from various databases to it. They're going to know my driving record because, obviously, it's going to be based on the Ministry of Transportation's licensing system. They're going to know, because they're going to be tied into the CPIC system, any criminal charges that I may have—that'll be tied to it as well—and information around citizenship, which means to say they're going to tie me into the passport system. So there are going to be three or four large databases that have lots of information about individuals that will be tied together through one provincial system.

Now, the first problem is, these are standalone systems that have a fair amount of security that are built into them. We do know that at times there are people who are trying to hack into these systems. We've seen in the past, for example, instances where people have hacked into the databases that are run by large department stores and gotten all kinds of information about individuals, which is really scary because they can charge up your credit card, they can find out where you live, they can also tell the types of things you like to buy so that they can profile you in some way. It's very, very scary when you think that people are looking very hard to be able to hack these systems. The Canadian passport system and the CPIC system are very secure systems; there's a lot of money and effort spent, as much as humanly possible, to make these systems as secure as they can be. But it doesn't mean to say that nobody can break into them. The problem is, once you start to link them all together in the way that we're suggesting under this bill, you're opening more opportunities for people to hack into the system by

the back door. And if they get in, they will have all kinds of information on you.

For example, if it was just the passport system, the only thing they'll be able to get about me, if the person hacks into the database that deals with passports, would be information about who I am, my picture, my date of birth, where I live—and that's about it. That's bad enough in itself. But if all of a sudden you start linking all of this together, now the person has a backdoor entry into the passport system, the person has an entry into the CPIC system—the CPIC system is the federal database that collects all the information about you and any criminal charges you've had, any time that you might have been surveyed by the police for being at a protest somewhere and had your picture taken because you're holding up a sign saying, "Hey, hey, ho, ho, time for"—it was not Bob Rae, it was, "Mike Harris has got to go."

They track all this information, right? So now we start linking the database for the passport system with the database of the CPIC system and we now have quite a bit of information that's available. Next, you bring in the driver's licence system and you tie that into the system as well. The person who hacks into the system is going to have access to all kinds of information that, quite frankly, as an individual I don't want anybody to know—and it's none of their business.

There's real concern, not only when it comes to the issue of privacy. Do you, as an individual, do you as a citizen of Ontario feel comfortable that somebody can hack into the system and find out all kinds of things about you? I think the answer's no. But the other thing is, it allows people that have minds that are much more devious than all of us put together to possibly do some pretty scary things. They could, if somebody hacks into that system, find out a lot about a person in regards to being able to track them, being able to profile them, being able to prey on them for either economic issues or criminal issues. I think that is really dangerous. One of the things the privacy commissioner tried to warn us about as we were going through public hearings on this bill is that if we're going to do this, we need to make sure we set the databases up in a way that, as much as humanly possible, we do not allow that information to be hacked into.

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She had some very specific suggestions, and one of them is, the only thing that you could possibly do, if you're going to have a database like this—I'll get to the technology later. The point is that the only thing the border security would be able to know is that I'm Gilles Bisson, I'm a citizen of the country of Canada, I reside in Ontario and there's no flag to indicate that I'm a terrorist, a potential terrorist or a criminal. In other words, the actual information about me that resides in a CPIC database or the passport database is not revealed. All it is, is a flag, and that's what she was trying to tell us. The only thing that's important for the person to know as you cross the border, the only thing that the border security people need to know, is that I am who I am, I've identi-

fied myself as who I say I am, that I'm a resident of Canada and there are no flags in the database to say that there is a problem. That's what she was trying to say to us, that you have to have a flagging system. In fact, that's how, for example, the CPIC system works. If you cross the border, the Americans are already able to look at our CPIC system. If they suspect that Gilles Bisson, who is crossing the border at Sarnia, may be somebody who's suspicious, they can ping the RCMP CPIC system and that CPIC system will say, "Gilles Bisson, resident of Canada, no flags." That's the end of it. They know that I'm clean, there's nothing about me that's suspicious and they let me go by.

If they ping the RCMP CPIC data system and they say, "Gilles Bisson, citizen of Canada, flagged criminal activity," they then have to call our authorities and it's up to the Canadian authorities to deal with Gilles Bisson who is trying to cross the border. Maybe I'm trying to evade capture for a criminal charge that's against me or maybe it's something I was charged with seven years ago and I've done my time, but they do not reveal to the American border security the information of what it is that I've done. All it is, is a flag.

So there has been a lot of work done on our databases—the Canadian passport system and CPIC system—that is already in place in order to give security authorities within Canada and the United States the ability to check someone out. The danger with this database is that we're making available the actual information and it's not going to be a flag system. They're going to be able to say, "Gilles Bisson, citizen of Canada, resides in Timmins," what my address is; my driver's licence information, which includes my driving record; and whatever other information that they're able to put into the database. There will be far, far more information available.

To me, it becomes two issues, or actually three issues. One, as a Canadian citizen, I really cherish that my privacy is respected, and I think all of us as Canadians understand that. The other principle is that there's only a certain amount of information that the government should be making available about me. We should not be sharing information in detail with the Americans, because then it becomes an issue of sovereignty. We as Canadians are a sovereign nation. Why should we allow the American authorities at border security or police or whatever to see information about us that, quite frankly, is none of their business? Yes, flag that I might be a suspicious character of some type. I don't have a problem with that. I understand that. But they should not have access to details that will be obtainable through the system.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: It's not.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I hear the parliamentary assistant saying it's not. I'm telling you it is. I've talked to a lot of people about how this works. I understand security measures far more than you realize, and all I'm saying is that it is a real concern.

Now, the privacy commissioner came before our committee because that was one of the conditions that I put

on second reading debate, as the MTO critic for the New Democratic caucus. We support the initiative. We think it's a good idea in order to enhance border crossing. We understand that. It's an economic issue as well. I said, "Bring the privacy commissioner before us so we can hear what she has to say." I know the parliamentary assistant will get up at the end of the speech and say, "Oh yes, but she said she's working with us, she wants to work with us and she likes the relationship that she has with the ministry." I agree. Of course she has a good relationship with the ministry, and I hope the ministry has a good relationship with her. But she came before the committee and had some very, very serious concerns about how these databases were going to be structured, and one of the points she was trying to make is that the way this legislation is going to allow the databases to be structured is scary from the perspective of an individual's privacy rights. She said, "I support the initiative," as I said I support the initiative. However, if we're going to do this, we really need to think through what kind of information people are going to be able to have access to. So I just want to make—

Interjection: Same as a passport.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, no. You guys don't get it. Anyway, just let me—it's my time and you guys can debate ad infinitum. You'll have all your opportunities at third reading ad infinitum. I'm just passing on the concerns that I have and others have, that I've been dealing with this.

First of all is the issue of the databases being tied together. The more you tie databases together, the more they are open to the possibility of somebody hacking in. If they hack in by the back door and we have more databases that are linked, people have access to far more information than we would ever want to give away.

All I'm saying is that what we should have done is have, yes, a security card but something that only flags the authorities to know there's something they need to call authorities about on the Canadian side in regard to an individual. They don't need to know the details about what's in the CPIC database system or the passport system etc. It just needs to be flagged. It's green or it's red; you can go through or you can't. That would be my first point.

The other part of all this is that the government is basically—well, I don't want to talk about RFIDs now; I'm going to come to that later.

The other concern that the privacy commissioner had—she said that a lot of what's in this bill, as far as the detail, is going to be left to regulation. Now, is that abnormal? Obviously not. For years there have been bills written in this House and the details were left to regulation, so this is not a new concept. I'm not going to attack the government and say, "Oh, my God, you're leaving this all to regulation, and this is different than anything that's ever happened in the past," because quite frankly, a lot of bills are written that way, where the details are left to the bureaucrats to write up by way of regulation that is then approved by cabinet.

But the point she made was—and I think this was an important point—because this is an issue of privacy information of individuals, there should be an ability to have public hearings on what happens with the regulations, that if the privacy commissioner or others out there see the regulations coming out and they are cause for concern, there should be an automatic right for public consultation so that we can get it right. One of the amendments we put forward is that we should have the ability to vet all of those regulations that will be made by way of this bill so that we do get it right.

Again, I want to say, as the critic for the New Democrat caucus, that we are not opposed to the concept of what the government is trying to do. We understand what this is all about. The Americans on the other side are going to tighten up their borders and we need to figure out a way for us to be able to continue that flow that we've had with the Americans for so many years. I think it's unfortunate they've done that, but I can't control what the United States does; all I can do is control what we do.

I understand what the government is trying to do. All I'm saying is that the method by which we're getting there and the process leave a lot to be desired. One thing that could have been done, that would have satisfied at least 50% of the concerns around this bill, would have been to allow the amendment we put forward to pass. That was recommended by the privacy commissioner; it wasn't me who dreamt this up. The privacy commissioner herself said before the committee that we need to have a process such that regulations, as drafted, would have public hearings around them so that any concerns about what's in the regulations could be vetted by a public process.

Again, we're talking about the private information of individuals, and we need to take that very, very seriously. We cannot allow ourselves to not do due diligence in making sure that at the end we get it right.

Let me propose this: Has anybody in this Legislature always gotten everything right? There's not an individual here, including myself, who can say, "I know exactly what needs to be done and I'm going to get it right 100% of the time." Not one of us can claim that. None of us collectively can claim that, either. We as legislators try the best we can. And I understand—

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I thought you were perfect.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, there are people in my campaign who think I'm perfect, but that's a whole other story.

The point is, collectively, we don't get it right all of the time, because sometimes there may be something that we're not seeing in the way a regulation is drafted. Sometimes it's somebody out in the public who has an interest in this who flags that there's a problem, or it's a privacy commissioner or others. Why shouldn't we benefit by having a process that's transparent, that allows the public to know what's going to go on when it comes to regulation and to say to us as legislators—and to cabinet, more importantly, because it will be cabinet at the end that will agree or disagree, and will approve the regulations—

"You got it right" or "You got it wrong." This is a really serious issue. It's around the issue of privacy. I worry that without proper scrutiny of the regulations and the ability of the public and others to scrutinize and view and go through the regulations, we may get things wrong.

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I'm just going to take a couple of bills to prove my point. I remember when the Conservatives first got elected in 1995, they came in with a revision of the Municipal Act, and they tried to undo what work had been done by the previous NDP government in regards to changes that we had made to the Municipal Act. The government came in and they had an ideological approach. I'm not arguing that this bill is ideological on the part of the Liberals. My point is, they came in and they changed the Municipal Act in order to be conforming with their political views. I remember standing in the House saying, "You've got this wrong; you've got this wrong; you've got that wrong. This section's a problem and it's not going to work. You're going to have municipalities up in arms over various issues of planning" etc. Do you know how many more bills we brought in during the time that the Tories were here to fix the original bill? We had seven bills come to the House afterward. You were here; you remember. There were seven bills that had to be introduced by the Conservative government to fix the problems with the initial bill. What we had said as opposition, and my friend Mr. Levac was there, was, "Hey, listen. God bless. You've got a majority government and you can do things as a majority government in regard to putting your stamp on things, but at least get it right."

We said to the government of the day under Mike Harris, "You've got to give this thing more time in committee. We need to fix the problems that we now see with the bill." Many people who sat on the committee had municipal experience or had planning experience and understood. People that came before our committee worried that what the government was doing wasn't going to work. I would argue that we still have problems with that act today, right? Because even the Liberal government has had to bring in some amendments to that act since they've become the government. Should I form the government after the next election, I'm going to have the same problem.

Laughter.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That's my leadership bid, by the way.

The point that I make is that none of us, collectively, always get it right. Collectively, we don't get it right, let alone individually. What is wrong with a public process that allows the public and those that are more knowledgeable on an issue to say, "Let's look at the regulations and in the end address the problem if a problem exists"? If the government chooses to ignore the advice of the public, that's their right. You know what the final outcome of that is? That's what we have elections for. If people are so upset that the government got something wrong, they'll turf them out in the election. That's the beauty of democracy. But at the very least, I think at the time

you're in government, you've got to give the public an opportunity to give scrutiny to the issues.

The technology being used: I want to speak to that for a few minutes. I understand what the approach here is. The approach is, they want technology that is going to speed up the crossing of the border. The idea is that you would have, in your wallet, a driver's licence that would have embedded within the driver's licence some technology that's a tank circuit. A tank circuit is a passive circuit that, once it gets within the range of the reader, activates your card and transmits a signal that allows the reader, some 10 metres away, to read the information that's contained on your card. The idea behind that—and I understand why this is so appealing—is that you don't have to physically stop at the border crossing and say, "Here." The idea is that as you're driving up, border security can sit there and look at their screen and say, "Green, green, green—red. Pull them over." I understand the technology and I understand why you're doing it.

If it was only read at the border and we could absolutely ensure that nobody else could read the information, well, maybe there's an argument for RFID technology. But here's the problem: There's all kinds of people out there for all kinds of different reasons—economic reasons, for issues just because people like to gather this information and like to hack systems, or people who have criminal intent—who will develop technology that will be able to read this card as I walk by them. Here's how it's going to work. I'll have this RFID card in my wallet, I'll put it in my pocket, and I'm going to walk along the street and somebody is going to have one of these units that tries to activate the tank circuit. It's basically a process of induction on the tank circuit that will transmit the information to the individual.

Now, there's a lot that has to happen for this hacker to make it work. First of all, you've got to figure out the frequencies, but people can figure those things out. If the person's going to get information, it's going to be an identifying number. It's not going to be the person's name. I understand that. But identifying numbers can be cross-referenced back in the database if you open the back door. That's the problem. This is why I was saying that the hooking up of all of these databases at the end is not as good an idea as we might think it is at times. Stand-alone databases serve a purpose when it comes to protecting the information within them, so that you're not basically having information flow from one database to the other.

What you're going to end up with in this technology is the possibility that somebody will basically be able to activate your card from a distance while you're not knowing, walking through the shopping centre, walking down the street, wherever it might be. That person might be able to—I'm not saying will be able to—read the information on your card. They're going to have this card and an identification number that's unique to you, and they're going to have some basic information, right? The problem is that now they've got the ID number, they can cross-reference it back into the database if they break in

from the other side. That was one of the concerns that was raised by the privacy commissioner, that you could end up in a situation where somebody, for whatever motives, is going to be able to get information about the individual for all kinds of different reasons that they can use it for.

The suggestion was made that what we need to do is, at the very least, have a different type of technology, that rather than having an RFID transmitting technology we have a card that's more like our bank cards—you have a little magnetic strip on the back—so that this thing is dormant; you cannot turn it on unless you put it into a reader. The only time that you are physically taking the information from your card and into the system is when you put it into the machine and it turns on the machine to read your card and it turns off when you pull it out—the same idea as a bank card or a credit card.

The reason the privacy commissioner said to, at the very least, do that is it diminishes the ability of people to hack the system. It's not that this is perfect either, because we all know that the more information we put on cards and on readers, the larger the risk is that somebody is going to break in. But the point she was making is at least limit the ability for people to hack the system. So move away from RFID technology, which is a transmitting device embedded in the card. Instead, go to a system that's more in kind with a credit card or a bank card that activates when you put the card into the reader as you're driving up to the border station. The border person looks, it shows green, and the person can go. Away you go. You've driven into the United States—no problem.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Except that it's unacceptable to the Americans.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, this is the point that I was going to make.

The issue is—and this is why I started with President Obama. It all links together. The parliamentary assistant is correct that the Americans have dictated what type of technology and what methods we should use. I would say it's a question of sovereignty. We, as a nation, and we, as a province, should be determining how this information is going to be shared or not shared by people in the crossing of the border. We do have a new administration in Washington under President Obama, and I have to think that he's going to do things differently than Mr. Bush did. I think that basically this legislation is not going to become enacted until, what, 2012 by the time it's done?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: June 1, 2009.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, 2009. Excuse me. I was thinking of the WSIB legislation. We're always enacting dates further up.

The point is, it's not as if we don't have an opportunity to get a sign that the President of the United States is prepared to change the Homeland Security policy on this issue. I think we should be doing some effort towards saying to the Americans, "We understand your need to protect your borders, but we have some issues with what you are suggesting and how that is to be done."

I would concur with what the privacy commissioner has told us, and that is, we should be looking at technology that limits the ability of people to get access to the information that we may have on our cards. I say to the government, that's something that quite easily could have been done.

With that, those are my comments for the morning, and I look forward to questions and comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Are there any questions and comments?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I am always interested in the thoughts and concerns raised by the member for Timmins—James Bay.

I want to remind people that this card is totally voluntary, which is the first and most important part of the identification. It is true that we are, as Canadians—as people in the province of British Columbia, in the province of Quebec and in many of our provinces—quickly moving to provide a card to people of our province who wish to use an identification card at the border. Under the homeland security legislation, under WHTI, we have to be able to provide a passport or an alternative document acceptable to the US by June 1, 2009. No Canadian needs to do this. Any Canadian who wishes to go to the US, or any Ontarian, can always use a passport under their legislation. There is no need to have this.

1010

I am interested in some of the concerns about the technology. We in the government are concerned about the use of technology in this effort, because it is a requirement that the RFID be installed—that is the radio frequency identification chip—that it be put in the card if you want to identify for citizenship. That is a concern of ours. But if it is to be accepted by the US, it has to have that.

The requirement is that the card we issue has a sleeve which would keep it from being read by any RFID reader, if it's in the sleeve. We are looking at a way to turn them off. Unfortunately, at the moment—we have made the inquiries with the privacy commissioner; she is aware of this—we do not yet have a commercially available switch on these cards.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I thought the member from Timmins—James Bay gave us an excellent history, and certainly his congratulations to Barack Obama, the President-elect, the Senator from Illinois.

It will be most interesting. Of course, the Minister of Transportation, in his previous role as Minister of Tourism, certainly forged a very good relationship, as he mentioned his remarks yesterday, with representative Louise Slaughter from Upper New York state. Indeed, I understand he had discussions with Senators Hillary Clinton and Chuck Schumer, the other Senator from New York state.

It really provides the opportunity, with a new administration coming into Washington. Perhaps somebody like Louise Slaughter will be the new head of homeland

security in the United States. That would be an excellent idea, because she has what I would describe as a more flexible view of the integral relationship that Canada and the United States has, particularly border states and border provinces such as Ontario and New Brunswick, Quebec, and other provinces that border the United States.

We've seen that there are communities in the eastern townships in Quebec where the boundary goes right through a kitchen in some people's homes. To facilitate people going back and forth for commerce, for visitation, is certainly important to the total health of both the border states in the United States and Ontario provinces, for commerce and economic well-being.

The member does make some legitimate observations about technology. We do know that no technology has ever been invented that's foolproof. If someone wants to get at it, they will get at it. They'll come up with sophisticated ways of doing it. But I think we need to move forward on this initiative.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Dave Levac: I listened carefully to the member in his expression of concerns regarding the technology. There's no question that he brings our attention to the details of how this is going to work. But what I want to do is to try to assure him that those very questions have been asked, not just by the opposition, but by us as well, and as this was developing in front—because these discussions were taking place in the committee that I expressed to you that I was on, in terms of the Council of State Governments, when we were moving from Ontario down to the States—Philadelphia, Washington—to discuss the very issue that he is talking about a couple years ago.

Those very questions have been brought up not just by us in Ontario, but by many of the states that were asked to participate in this. So to give him some solace that this is being discussed and dealt with should help him a little bit.

On the other point he mentioned with regard to Mr. Bradley, I don't think he is wrong on this one. I think if you take a sober second thought and step back from it, he was engaged in that conversation that you're having and he was making the judgment based on what was good for Ontario. You've identified that, and I appreciate that. You've identified the fact that on the economic side, we are definitely going to be left out of the loop completely if we don't get on board. As the parliamentary assistant said, we are talking about initiatives that the United States is employing, whether we like it or not. If we did not move from our 48% use of our passport, we had to come up with some alternative.

My last comment to him was, on the optional side, there's another phase of this card that I'm extremely proud of—I've brought that up in this House many times—and that is the non-driver driver's licence issue for the people who do not have access to that. I think that's a good-news story as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): It being 10:15 of the clock, this House stands recessed until 10:30, at which time we will have question period.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: They're going to be filing in any moment now, but we are going to have with us today Graham Flint, who is the chair and spokesperson for an organization called FORCE, Friends of Rural Communities and the Environment; 40 to 50 folks from the communities of Hamilton, Flamborough, Milton and Burlington, including Councillor Margaret McCarthy from the city of Hamilton, and Councillor Jan Mowbray from the town of Milton.

Hon. George Smitherman: I hope that members of the Legislature will join with me in welcoming the Honourable Mike Harcourt, the former mayor of Vancouver and Premier of the province of British Columbia, and Brad Graham, an assistant deputy minister from the Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure. Yesterday, they helped to lead our growth plan summit up in Vaughan.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Welcome, Mr. Premier.

Hon. John Gerretsen: I would like to welcome as our guest today the former federal member from Leeds-Grenville Joe Jordan, who is with us today in the east gallery.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I have two introductions this morning. My good friend Jacob Rudolph is here with his mom, Jan Whitelaw. I don't think they're here yet, but they will be shortly. Jacob is about four or five and excited to be here at the Legislature today.

As well, I'd like to introduce to the Legislature Dennis Mock, the president of Nipissing University, who is here with his northern colleagues from northern universities. We welcome them here today.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to introduce guests from my riding. They include the mayor of the municipality of Clarington, Jim Abernethy; the director of finance for Clarington, Nancy Taylor; and the solicitor for the municipality, Dennis Hefferon. Welcome.

Hon. John Milloy: I think members will be pleased to know that we're welcoming visitors from the Council of Ontario Universities today at Queen's Park. With us, including a number of university presidents and senior officials, are Celia Ross, Kim Feddersen, Robert Bourgeois, Peter George, Dennis Mock, Sarah McKinnon, Richard Marceau, Susan Marlin, Ranjana Bird, Paul Genest and Jennifer Grass.

I invite all members to attend a reception by COU with Ontario Research Chairs in room 230 over the lunch hour.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'd ask the Legislature to join me in welcoming Joe McCormick, Colette MacGuire, Graham Huntley, Sharon Yovanoff and John Yovanoff, members of ROSSCORE.

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I would like to acknowledge the members of the Canadian Diabetes Association who are seated in the public galleries today.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The guests I introduced have now joined us. They're in the gallery.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I would like to introduce Carole Heffernan and Anna Lipp. Anna is page Emily Heffernan's grandmother and Carole is her mother.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Although my colleague already recognized members from the Canadian Diabetes Association, I just want to point out that we have two very special people from northwestern Ontario: Suzanne Stirling from the Canadian Diabetes Association in Thunder Bay, and Stacey Woods, who is the first woman in northwestern Ontario to be able to access an insulin pump as an adult under our new program and funding. So, Stacey, welcome. Thank you very much.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome a guest of mine in the Speaker's gallery today, a good old friend from my riding of Elgin-Middlesex-London, Christine Paterson. Chris, welcome to Queen's Park today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development. Minister, you're fairly new to the economic development portfolio, but I trust by now you are in the full swing of things. Certainly you were shuffled into your new position at a very difficult time, but at the same time, you have been given a great opportunity to prove yourself as an economic leader. You have an opportunity to be creative, bold and innovative.

Minister, what new initiatives have you introduced to help Ontario recover from deficit, from the rapid loss of the manufacturing core and from our historic decent into have-not status?

Hon. Michael Bryant: There's a lot to work with in that question. I appreciate the member's comments and his sentiments there.

I'll say that certainly one of the jobs of the Minister of Economic Development today is to administer the existing Next Generation of Jobs Fund, the advanced manufacturing loan program, the regional programs that are in existence, and to coordinate amongst all the economic ministries—to assist those economic ministries—in the delivery of those existing programs. We are talking about programs that have leveraged jobs and leveraged investments in this province. At the same time, obviously, we want to work with those businesses that are facing new challenges as a result of the events, particularly of the last few months, and I'm happy to elaborate on that in my supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: There's nothing new. The minister is still apologizing for the five-point flopped plan. In fact, it sounds like the minister is just regurgitating the same old lines that his predecessor tried to feed to the people of Ontario.

Minister, if you have nothing new to offer, wasn't the cabinet shuffle just meaningless? Don't you think that given all that's happened in our province and our economy, you should start adjusting, rearranging and changing the old approach? Or are you just a new face for the Premier's five-point flopped plan?

Hon. Michael Bryant: It is quite right that the government is engaging with industry leaders, with companies and with the federal government—we've spoken to the new federal industry minister and are meeting him as well—to in fact make those adjustments. You are seeing already in the investments of the Next Generation of Jobs Fund—the point being that they're investments in the next generation of jobs; in other words, those jobs with the creative class skills, those jobs with industries that are, in fact, in a position particularly right now to be growing.

Those adjustments are being undertaken on an on-going basis. They are reflected in the decisions made on the administration of these programs. They are also reflected in the economic policy, as it is unfolding in this government. As you will see, in the weeks and months to come and of course leading up to the budget of next year, in fact that emphasis on the next generation of jobs becoming even more intensified. This is, yes, a crisis with challenges—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Final supplementary.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I find the answer disappointing. We're well into the difficulty that this province is facing and you're only now just starting to think about those things. There's no promise for the future.

For instance, I wonder what he makes of the recent statements made by the Minister of International Trade. She said that Ontario needs the United States to recover, that our fortunes are forever linked. But the TD Bank says that we can't rely on the US, that what we need to find is our own ways to write our own economic destiny.

Minister, who do you side with? Should we seek a bold new vision or should we continue down the same McGuinty path of dependence on the US economy?

Hon. Michael Bryant: Firstly, the Premier right now, as we speak, is in China, leading an Ontario and in fact in many ways, a national delegation. But let there be no mistake: If the member is suggesting that Ontario no longer needs to have a positive trade relationship with the United States of America, then he's wrong. TD is certainly not saying that. Certainly, our fabulous Minister of International Trade is absolutely right that, as our relationship and trade and exports with the United States grows, so will Canada.

I'm happy to speak with the member about these issues, but more importantly, to talk about the millions of dollars that have been invested in Ontario by businesses

and those jobs that have been created because of the programs that have been in place under this government for several years. And there's more to come.

1040

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question back to the Minister of Economic Development. On October 22, the Legislature learned that Ontario, under Dalton McGuinty, has returned to deficit financing. Two weeks later, Ontario families were greeted with the news bombshell that for the first time in Confederation, Ontario would be on the receiving end of equalization payments. In other words, under Dalton McGuinty, the province of Ontario is now on the welfare rolls of Confederation. As Minister of Economic Development, what new initiatives are you bringing forward to cabinet to ensure that Ontario is not a have-not province for one, single more year?

Hon. Michael Bryant: The first thing that we're doing is standing up for the people of Ontario. As the member knows well—and I'm sure he commiserates over this as well; I'm sure he does—the fiscal federalist formula today sees bales and bales of hay being paid into the equalization formula and Ontario getting barely a litre of milk out of it. It is a formula that is broken. It is a formula that needs fixing.

Ontario continues to be the engine of the economy in this country. Ontario continues to seek out changes to the fiscal federalist formula that will see a reflection of the contribution that Ontario makes to the rest of the country and the number of dollars that ought to be going out, yes, but also the number of dollars that ought to be going in. I look forward to speaking about this further in my supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: That was bales and bales of something, but it certainly wasn't the facts Ontario citizens want to hear. Minister, those same old tired lines won't work any more, this notion of blame the formula, as opposed to blaming the high-taxing and high-spending policies of Dalton McGuinty that have put Ontario dead last in job creation and in economic growth. The notion of Ontario being a have-not province and receiving equalization payments is shocking and weighs on the hearts of all Ontario residents. To make matters worse, the McGuinty government is sleepwalking through this tragic point in our history.

Where is the plan, Minister? Will you draw the line here and say, "This year and no more"? Will you stand in your place, will you come forward to cabinet with a new plan to get Ontario off the welfare rolls of Confederation?

Hon. Michael Bryant: I know the member wouldn't want to be running Ontario down and I know the member wouldn't want to be talking Ontario's economy down. I know he wouldn't want to deny that, in fact, the Ontario economy does continue to be the engine of the Canadian economy. It does. If the member disagrees, I would love

for him to take a look at the budgets and the books of this country, and I know he would want to stand up and applaud those businesses that have made this province the engine of Canada's economy.

We will continue to administer those programs that have brought success. We will continue to build on that success. We will continue to build on success that has led to investments in the member's own riding. I've seen the picture with the big smiling face of the member with a company that received investments in his own riding, that led to investments there and that led to jobs. We will continue to do that. Yes, we will continue to build on our success—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: First the minister blames the formula for Ontario being on equalization; now he's saying we're leading the country in growth. The minister needs a reality check, just like Scotiabank's report from the other day: minus 0.9% Ontario growth rate for 2009, Minister—dead last in all of Canada. Two hundred thousand well-paying manufacturing jobs have left our province. Some 36,000 talented Ontarians have left our province to work in other provinces. No doubt, we have tremendous resources in our province, tremendously talented and innovative entrepreneurs and businesses, but your high taxes, your high hydro rates and your runaway spending have shackled our business class and chased entrepreneurs out of our province, so now we're dead last. Minister, one last time: Ontario on the welfare rolls no longer. What plan are you bringing forward to cabinet?

Hon. Michael Bryant: Well, there we go. The approach of the Ontario government is an activist approach that sees investments, by way of grants and loans, regional and strategic, directly into companies and directly into people through our Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. The member can't have it both ways. You cannot get rid of those programs, you cannot get rid of those investments and you cannot, in addition to that, cut taxes and expect to have a sustainable economy. The member is leading a race to the bottom.

The province of Ontario under Dalton McGuinty is in fact leading the charge, building on our success. That's why in July of this year the government announced a \$2.85-million advanced manufacturing loan to Stanpac Inc. to support a \$10-million investment in the member's riding. He stood there at the press conference with a big smile and congratulated the government—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

OPP DISCIPLINARY HEARING

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Attorney General. Over the past weeks a number of questions have been raised about the administration of justice in Ontario under the McGuinty government. My question today concerns a police discipline hearing being con-

ducted against two senior OPP officers. In the course of the hearing, evidence was presented that OPP Commissioner Fantino stated, "Are you going to execute the disloyal one, or am I?" My question is this: Does the Attorney General find it troubling that the OPP commissioner appointed by the McGuinty Liberals would refer to another senior OPP officer in terms of, "Are you going to execute him, or am I?"

Hon. Christopher Bentley: What is a bit surprising is that a former Attorney General would ask about testimony that may have been given or may be given during the course of a hearing where findings have to be made by the adjudicator. We respect the fairness of all proceedings. Whether an individual likes or doesn't like what he or she hears, agrees or disagrees with the position being advanced, takes a particular position on the result of the hearing, the foundation of our system of justice is that we let hearings conclude, and conclude fairly, according to the principles of natural justice and the rule of law. That's what should happen—not only in that case, but in every case.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Perhaps the Attorney General and the McGuinty government don't find these remarks troubling, but I think most people would find them troubling. Most Ontarians might feel that that language might appear in a Third World country but certainly not in a legal system, in a justice system, such as our own.

But what is equally troubling is this: When the counsel acting for one of the senior OPP officers pointed out that Commissioner Fantino appeared to change his testimony from one part of the hearing to another, the judge hearing the matter was immediately told by counsel for the OPP—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I don't need some armchair Speakers. Thank you very much. I have great confidence in the table.

I just do caution the honourable member on the direction that he is going. I encourage him to bear in mind the sub judice rule. Certainly, from what I have seen in the newspapers, this is a hearing that is ongoing.

Mr. Howard Hampton: When this is remarked upon by the justice hearing the case, he is immediately asked to recuse himself from the hearing. Not only that, but the hearing is then told that senior counsel in the Ministry of the Attorney General are going to support the motion for the justice to recuse himself. This sounds like even the Ministry of the Attorney General is interfering in this hearing—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Again, it is, with respect, surprising that the former Attorney General would be purporting to quote from an ongoing hearing and asking for commentary. With respect to the specific allegation, I understand that the result of the motion is not yet made. Obviously, whatever the commentary, no decision has been made by the ministry because no result of the

motion has been made. So I would ask the member to remember when he was the Attorney General and to remember the principles which he had to uphold then and which still apply today: the principles of fairness of hearings, regardless of what you may want the result to be.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I express no interest in this.

Again, I ask the Attorney General: Counsel for the OPP actually names the senior counsel in the Ministry of the Attorney General. He names Dennis Brown, general counsel, Ministry of the Attorney General, as supporting a motion for the justice to recuse himself from the hearing and says that if the justice doesn't recuse himself from the hearing, the Ministry of the Attorney General will support a judicial review application.

All the justice is trying to do is hear the evidence, but it sounds as if lawyers, counsel representing the Ministry of the Attorney General, don't want him to hear the evidence. What is going on here?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: You're wrong, period. What's trying to happen at the hearing is that they're trying to have a fair hearing, a fair hearing on the basis of what is going on in the proceeding and a fair hearing that is not being assisted by the extracted commentary of the member today. Let's let the hearing proceed and continue according to the principles of fairness which govern hearings in all courts in all forums everywhere in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): New question.

OPP DISCIPLINARY HEARING

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Attorney General: What is troubling about this is I think that the justice hearing the case would like to hear the facts. But when he hears that if he does not recuse himself—and by the way, counsel representing the OPP is not some freshman counsel; he is someone who worked many years in the Ministry of the Attorney General. When he stands and says, "I move that the justice recuse himself," and, "I have to tell the justice that I have spoken with a senior crown counsel in the Ministry of the Attorney General, and they are prepared to support the motion that you recuse yourself," how can a fair hearing happen under conditions like that?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The member is not correct to be commenting on an ongoing proceeding. Fair hearings are not assisted by commentary on their evidence, testimony submissions outside of the fora. The member knows that; you're a former Attorney General. You should respect the proceedings, you should respect the fairness and allow those in charge of the proceedings to make the decisions they must, without the commentary that you're making here today.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: This is not my commentary. This is from the transcript of the hearings. A senior

lawyer who worked many years in the Ministry of the Attorney General, now representing the OPP commissioner, says: "Well, I can indicate, sir, that the discussions have been had with the director of legal services branch at the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, Ms. Anne McChesney, and with general counsel to the Ministry of the Attorney General, Dennis Brown," and then goes on to point out that if the justice doesn't recuse himself, doesn't withdraw from the hearing, the Ministry of the Attorney General will support a judicial review ordering the justice to withdraw from the hearing.

I ask again: How can there be a fair hearing when these kinds of tactics are being conducted, apparently by counsel for the Ministry of the Attorney General?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The former Attorney General is wrong. There will be fair hearings, as long as we allow them to proceed according to the rules of natural justice and the legal principles that apply. This one should be allowed to proceed without commentary by the honourable member.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Well, I could accept what the Attorney General is saying if the justice hearing the case were allowed to make a decision one way or another. But in this case, the justice hasn't even been allowed to take into consideration the motion, whether he should recuse himself, before he is met with the information that if he doesn't recuse himself, the Ministry of the Attorney General will support a judicial review application ordering him to recuse himself.

Again, as the administrator of justice in Ontario, who is supposed to ensure that hearings and trials are conducted fairly, how can this be a fair hearing when these kinds of tactics are being employed—actually mentioning senior counsel in the Ministry of the Attorney General supporting judicial review before a decision has even been arrived at?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: That's right. The hearings should be allowed to proceed according to the principles of natural justice and the rules of law which apply. This one should be allowed to proceed without the commentary.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a question for the Minister of Labour. By now, you must realize just how flawed your Bill 119 really is. No one is buying your argument that it will improve worker safety or uncover the underground economy.

Let me tell you what I'm hearing from small businesses around the province. I'd like to quote: "It is concerning to hear that the Liberal government would like to push this legislation through without first allowing committee hearings throughout the province to take place and to consider other options to mandatory coverage by

WSIB. This will not be any benefit to small business, but will only benefit large unions."

Minister, will you do what my constituent is asking for and extend public hearings on the bill to communities across the province?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I want to let all the members here know that a lot of comments and letters have been read into the record by members opposite and I'd like to read one about the member's party leader.

This is by Ron Johnson, deputy director of the Interior Systems Contractors Association of Ontario. Here is what he had to say about Mr. Tory: "You visited us last year, Mr. Tory. You assured the construction industry in the spring of 2007 that you understood the WSIB reform was essential to the health of the construction industry." I'd like to know if this member agrees with his party leader. I'd like to know who's running the show over there. You talk about flip-flops. Mr. Tory is the biggest flip-flopper we've ever seen.

I want to ask the member, do you agree with your party leader when he said he understood that the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Norm Miller: Minister, small businesses in all sectors are afraid. You have raised the spectre of mandatory WSIB coverage across all types of businesses. Let me read what another constituent wrote to me: "Let me add my voice to those who are concerned about the current plan to add mandatory WSIB coverage to construction company owners. This seems to be the thin edge of the wedge to me. As you well know, the tourism business can ill afford to be hit with another 'tax.' I realize that we (tourism operators) are not under the gun right now, but the chief of the WSIB has said that he would like to see more industries covered."

Minister, now that Ontario has been reduced to a have-not province, I would like to think that you're going to help small business instead of hitting them with another hidden tax.

Will you listen to this constituent's concerns and give your solemn promise not to extend mandatory WSIB coverage to other sectors?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I say to this member, you've got to track down your party leader and find out where he stands on this. Here are a few more comments from Ron about John Tory's position on this. Here's what he had to say: "At the same time, I understand that he insisted that a level playing field should be created throughout the bidding process and that any unfair advantage to the underground economy should be eliminated." We agree with that. We want a level playing field. We want to make sure that those construction workers are safe.

I don't know where that member or that party stands, but all I see is a big flip-flop here. I would hope that they would retreat back to the comments that Mr. Tory made to the association about understanding the need for this legislation, understanding the need to protect construction workers and to level the playing field, understanding the health and safety of the construction industry—

Mr. Norm Miller: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—
Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for Parry Sound—Muskoka.

Mr. Norm Miller: —I'll be filing for a late show.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

The member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I recognize it is a Thursday, and the Thursday before a constituency week, but I'd like to get through this question period.

The member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

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MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope you're going to add on eight seconds for that.

To the Acting Premier: With each passing day, it becomes clearer that this government has no idea how to deal with Ontario's growing job crisis. Yesterday, Navistar International announced the layoff of 470 employees, including plant workers, office staff and management, at its truck plant in Chatham. The job cuts start January 31 and will leave the plant with about 400 employees. Sterling Trucks, owned by Daimler Trucks North America, is closing its St. Thomas truck plant, throwing 1,300 workers out of work.

Will you admit that your auto strategy is a failure and that you have no plan to deal with the jobs crisis that is engulfing Ontario?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Economic Development.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I just want to speak to the Navistar situation. There was an investment made in the summer of 2003 by the previous government, just before the 2003 election, to provide funding for the company, at the time facing closure. We have also just learned of this news and are obviously very concerned. We are looking at the agreement. It is an agreement that we expect Navistar to honour. We want those jobs to be here. We want those investments to be here. We want to do everything we can, working with the workers and management, to keep those jobs here. But we do also have a contract in place, and the fact that it was undertaken by the previous government does not mean that we will not enforce the contract. We will enforce the contract.

Mr. Paul Miller: Minister, Ontario is shutting down, and your government has no plan. Manufacturers are saying that thousands may lose their jobs in the next few months because of the credit squeeze. Workers at the CAMI Automotive plant in Ingersoll are fearful of major layoffs and output stoppage by the end of this year, when they have already suffered an eight-week idle period.

Will you admit that your government has absolutely no idea what to do about the growing economic crisis gripping Ontario and that you have absolutely no plan to create and sustain jobs in our province?

Hon. Michael Bryant: The approach is to make investments in human capital, to make investments in training, to make investments in companies, to make investments through the advanced manufacturing loan program to leverage more investments, and to make public investments by way of grants to leverage more investments. It is that approach that not only deals with the need for greater innovation, which I know the member wants to have, but also deals with the challenges facing a particular company, whether it be around liquidity, whether it be around the credit crunch or otherwise, so we can work with these companies to provide the dollars they need. But we do so in the context of an agreement, an agreement that says that if a company does not meet its standards, there are clawback provisions. I can assure you with respect to Navistar that we were looking closely at those clawback provisions.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would just ask the honourable members: I know that there are discussions taking place, and it's nice to see those discussions taking place in a civilized manner, but I would ask that you take those discussions to either the east or west chamber or outside the door so that all members and our guests who are here can hear the questions being asked.

HEART DISEASE

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: My question is for the Minister of Health Promotion, the Honourable Margaret Best. Heart disease, or cardiovascular disease, is the leading cause of death in our province, and every year, unfortunately, more than 7,000 people die from sudden cardiac arrest. More than 40% of us will actually develop heart disease over the course of our lifetimes, which is nevertheless largely preventable. How? By making healthy food choices, by being active every day, by avoiding excessive alcohol, by being smoke-free and by having blood pressure levels checked regularly.

Unfortunately, many Ontarians are not even aware of their predisposition to sudden cardiac arrest. November is national CPR Month—cardiopulmonary resuscitation—and in fact, today is CPR day at Queen's Park. What has the McGuinty government done in terms of prevention and awareness to combat this group of cardiovascular conditions, or heart disease?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I would like to thank the member for Etobicoke North for his question. As a physician and MPP, he continues, I know, his strong advocacy in these areas.

Earlier today, I had the pleasure of attending an event with the Heart and Stroke Foundation, where we announced that Toronto's emergency medical services will be receiving 40 public access defibrillators for their cardiac safe city program. The cardiac safe city program helps to increase both awareness and access to defibrillators throughout the city through funding from the Heart and Stroke Foundation. As the health promotion minister, my goal is to provide Ontarians with access to services, tools and education to achieve and maintain good health.

That is why the McGuinty government provided \$3 million to the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario to place—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: I understand that defibrillators, coupled with ongoing CPR training, are having a positive and salutary benefit regarding the prevention of cardiovascular deaths. I trust we will continue to work with community partners on the placement of the thousand defibrillators program. As well, there is also a great need, of course, to focus on cardiovascular risk factors. So a series of questions: What is the McGuinty government doing in terms of risk factor management? What are we doing to support people in making healthy lifestyle choices? What is the McGuinty government doing to assist people to avoid tobacco use, maintain a healthy diet, and stay active and well?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I would like to advise the honourable member opposite that—sorry.

Interjections.

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I'd like to advise our member, the member for Etobicoke North, that we are in fact continuing to engage in providing investment in defibrillators in Ontario. I would also like to highlight that in addition to providing defibrillators, the Ministry of Health Promotion has been investing \$3.4 million a year in initiatives designed to promote heart health across the province through the Ontario heart health program. The Ontario heart health program is part of the Ontario government's comprehensive cardiac strategy which includes health promotion and disease prevention. The—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, minister. New question, the member from Durham.

TIME ALLOCATION

Mr. John O'Toole: My question is to the Deputy Premier. At the current time, you have time-allocated two bills. Bill 119 is a tax on small business. And now, Bill 114 has been time allocated, some would say, in a rather treacherous manner. The public hearings were this morning for about an hour and a half. However, the amendments, as you would know, were due yesterday at noon, even before the public hearings. This afternoon we will be doing clause-by-clause to finalize the bill. I'm asking you, why have you time-allocated Bill 114, which you know amends regulations retroactively?

Hon. George Smitherman: I do appreciate very much that the member used the reference "as you know" twice in the question on matters which, frankly, were it not for the member's invigorated activity on this at committee, I wouldn't have known. The responsible minister will be in a position soon to address the particular circumstance that the honourable member raised earlier in committee. I regret that I'm not in a position on the substance of the matter with respect to the retroactivity of regulation to be fully cognizant of the member's issue. I will work with the Minister of Finance to ensure there's a

timely response to the honourable member relating to his issue raised at committee this morning.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. John O'Toole: I appreciate the response, Minister. That is quite genuine. You would know that the legal counsel and the mayor are here, as well as the director of finance. Really, they know and I'm expecting that the people who drafted the bill in your ministry, or your government's ministry—they amended schedule A, section 2, which amends retroactively the Assessment Act, which changes the exemption status of limestone which has been widely held under the Assessment Act. The amendment, in fact, destroys their current legal argument, which is before the courts.

1110

Minister, I'm asking you today—as you've suggested you might, and I commend you for that—to instruct the minister to at least withhold and allow this case to proceed before the courts before this legislation destroys the legal case on which this municipality spent a considerable amount of money to get before the courts on November 14. Would you do that for the municipality?

Hon. George Smitherman: No, I'm not in the habit nor the position to be giving advice to my colleague minister on that matter. But I do think that through the honourable member's raising of this at committee and here in the House, I will take the question under advisement, seek to work with the Minister of Finance, and to produce, in a timely manner, for the honourable member and indeed for the community and the people of Clarington, a response to the specific case that's been brought forward.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of the Environment. The McGuinty government is well aware of St Marys Cement's proposal to develop a massive new greenfield quarry in the Flamborough area of the city of Hamilton. The proposal is for an open-pit mine in the middle of the natural heritage system of the greenbelt, where ground water is crucial to the provision of clean, safe drinking water to more than 3,000 residents of Carlisle. Two thousand people from the area sent postcards asking the McGuinty government, once and for all, to stop this quarry, which is a serious threat to residents' water safety.

Will the minister say today when the government is going to step in and stop the quarry?

Hon. John Gerretsen: First of all, I appreciate the question very much from the member. I would just like, for the record, to note that we are very proud of the accomplishments that this government made with respect to the greenbelt, something, by the way, that your caucus—only half the members supported the greenbelt at the time.

Let me also compliment the individuals who are here today from FORCE for their interest in the environment.

But as the member well knows, the permit that has been issued is simply for a pump test. There are many

other permits that may be required if the pump test proves to be adequate and meets the ministry's requirements. There will be municipal approvals that are going to be required from the municipality. There will be approvals required from the Ministry of Natural Resources as well with respect to a permit.

We want to make sure that the testing is done properly. We decided to have the testing redone by the company because of the excessive amount of rain water that fell during the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This government's greenbelt is turning into a greed belt, from what we can tell. The availability of safe drinking water is at stake here. Doesn't anybody remember Walkerton? I remember when the first water restrictions and bans hit the Carlisle community when I was still sitting on city council in Hamilton. Advisers to the government have called quarries a man-made threat of provincial concern because they create a direct pathway to the aquifer for contaminants. They recommended that new quarries should not be situated too closely to a municipal wellhead protection area. The Environmental Commissioner himself has clearly told the government to screen out development proposals exactly like this one, which put the interests and profits of the aggregate mining industry ahead of the public's water supply and environmental protection.

When will the government protect residents, farmers, businesses and schools near Carlisle by heeding the independent advice of the Environmental Commissioner and stopping this quarry development?

Hon. John Gerretsen: Let me repeat, once again, that this is a pump test; this is not a permit for a quarry. A number of safeguards have been built into this. Let me remind you and the members of FORCE who are here today.

The safeguards include that the quality and quantity of water will be extensively monitored by the ministry. Secondly, the project will receive independent oversight and reporting. Also, the rate of pumping has been reduced by 50%, and the permit has extensive consultation and reporting requirements. In order for the second test to take place, we will once again be placing the matter on the EBR for 30 days.

We are interested in protecting the greenbelt; we are also interested in making sure that there is quarry material available if and when required. But no quarry will be opened up there unless the testing that is being done here will meet our qualifications. And the other approvals from both the municipalities and the Ministry of Natural Resources have to be—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. David Oraziotti: My question is for the Minister of Labour. When most Ontarians think about the health care sector, they think of the well-being of patients. But

there's another group that we should also consider. Health care workers in my riding of Sault Ste. Marie and across the province not only provide high-quality care and treatment for Ontarians, but also, at times, put their own lives at risk.

Minister, earlier this week you announced that our government will be creating a new, permanently funded team of specialists to help improve workplace safety for health workers in Ontario. What was the reason behind the establishment of the Ministry of Labour's health care unit? Can you please explain how the health care unit is funded and whether or not this is new funding or money taken from other workplace health and safety inspection activities?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I would like to thank the member for Sault Ste. Marie for his advocacy on the safety of our health care workers. We have 480,000 health care workers in this province who protect us day in and day out. It's only right that we protect them.

I want to say that after the final report of the SARS commission, Justice Archie Campbell said that hospitals are dangerous places, just like mines and factories. What we did at that time was put a temporary health care team in place after that SARS report. With this announcement, what we've done is made this health care unit permanent, a team that will go into those health care sector workplaces and make sure that they can take a proactive approach to the health and safety of those health care workers. They now have new, permanent funding of \$2.1 million. This involves hiring and training 17 full-time equivalent specialists—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. David Oraziotti: Until the formation of the Ministry of Labour's health care unit within its occupational health and safety branch, can you tell us who is responsible for monitoring workplace health and safety in hospitals and other health care workplaces?

As well, Ontarians would like to know whether the health care team contributes to the ministry's overall Safe at Work Ontario strategy. As well, what are some of the other initiatives that the Ministry of Labour has introduced since the time of SARS?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Again, thank you to the member.

The Ministry of Labour staff is responsible for inspecting the health and safety regulations in provincially regulated industrial sector workplaces, looked after by what is now a special team in the health care sector. So this unit will be doing that.

In terms of the overall Safe at Work Ontario strategy, the health care unit will also provide support to all provincially regulated work places. We have added an additional 200 inspectors to bring our inspector levels to over 400. We've provided updated infection control training for the ministry's 233 industrial inspectors. We've established an advisory committee for the health care sector under section 21 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act. We've done a lot to help in this field.

PROSTATE CANCER SCREENING

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is to the Minister of Health. I quote the Thunder Bay Chronicle from September 15, 2007. Dalton McGuinty says, "It's essential to cover the PSA test for men." In light of the statement by your leader and your predecessor's promise, will you fulfill your promise and ensure that the costs of prostate-specific antigen tests for all men over 50 will be covered by OHIP beginning January 1, 2009?

Hon. David Caplan: As was laid out not only in the election platform, but by my colleague the Minister of Finance in the recent budget—which I would add that this member voted against—we will be covering the cost of PSA testing in Ontario, in keeping with our commitments, starting January 1.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Minister, OHIP already covers PSA tests when a man has been diagnosed with prostate cancer. In many cases, it's simply too late and the cancer has spread. So I want to be specific with you on the fact that the Ontario director of the Canadian Prostate Cancer Network met with one of your senior advisers and she said that the Ontario government is not going to implement coverage of PSA screening tests on January 1, 2009. Instead, meetings will be set up in January 2009 to decide what will be happening re the PSA tests. My constituent Hans Vanderkley, of the Lindsay Prostate Cancer Support Group, is concerned. Minister, are you going to cover the cost of PSA testing for all men over 50 on January 1, 2009?

Hon. David Caplan: Oddly, this member, having voted against this measure contained in the budget—also, this member advocates a \$3-billion cut to health care.

Interjection.

Hon. David Caplan: I say to the member from Simcoe—Grey, who really doesn't care about these matters—I repeat to the member who wants and wishes to cut a further \$3 billion out of health care, which I adamantly oppose, that it seems the member has a hard time taking yes for an answer. The government's approach generally supports informed decision-making between the physician and the patient, making the best determination of the appropriateness of tests for each individual. That's the approach that we've taken as a government, those are the commitments that we've made, that is what I reiterate here today, and I hope that this member will, in fact, inform her constituent of this answer when she has a chance to be back in her riding during constituency week.

1120

WATER SUPPLY

Mr. Peter Tabuns: To the environment minister: The 72-home hamlet of Colgan is situated on the Oak Ridges moraine and has had poor water supply for 12 years due to high-volume water use at a local golf course and decreased rainfall. The community is accessing water from the moraine's aquifer and has been on water restriction since April. However, the local township, which includes Colgan, has recently approved a development that will

bring 2,300 people, a 170-bed nursing home and a strip mall to Colgan. The aquifer will be tapped even further to provide water. Why has this government created a moraine act that protects the right to build golf courses and developments but doesn't protect its water supply?

Hon. John Gerretsen: I am not familiar with this situation. I'm certainly prepared to look into it and get back to the member on it.

But the greenbelt basically protects all those environmentally sensitive areas as well as good farmland in those 1.8 million acres of land. There were some infilling provisions that were allowed in existing municipalities and it may very well be that the kind of development he is talking about is infilling within that municipality. I'm more than prepared to get back to the member on this particular issue. I'm just not familiar with the details that he's described here today.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It isn't simply a question of details, it's whether or not you're going to protect the water supply. The question was asked by my colleague and I'm asking you. Are you going to take action, legal action that you can take, to reform the act so that the water supply is protected on the moraine and so that homeowners aren't in a position where they're going to be living with water restrictions for decades or be in a situation where people who bought homes will have incredible difficulty selling them because people will ask where the water will come from?

Will you go back to the act and revise it so that the water supply is protected?

Hon. John Gerretsen: We take any issues with respect to drinking water very seriously and certainly, if there are issues here that need to be resolved by the provincial government, we will do that. I will just leave it at that. We will look into this situation and get back to the member in the near future.

VETERANS

ANCIENS COMBATTANTS

Mr. Dave Levac: My question is for the Minister Responsible for Seniors. As you know, Ontarians courageously protected the freedom of our province, our nation and, indeed, the world by serving in World War I, World War II, the Korean War and conflicts worldwide. More than 1.5 million Canadians, many of them Ontarians, bravely fought in the wars but, sadly, more than 110,000 soldiers did not return home to their loved ones and to our province.

As we approach Remembrance Day, we must remember the service and sacrifice of our veterans, which I know all in the House do. We should all take the time, not just on Remembrance Day, to honour and thank our veterans, their spouses, and the widows and widowers.

Can the minister tell the House what the government is doing to honour Ontario's veterans beyond Remembrance Day throughout the province?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: Thank you to my colleague for a very thoughtful question at this important time. Remembrance Day is indeed a time to pause and reflect upon the sacrifices our veterans made to protect our shared Canadian values. I often think of my uncle, who served as a sea captain in the Canadian Merchant Marine during World War II. Honouring our veterans is important, not just on Remembrance Day, but year-round and it's important to provide our veterans with opportunities to share those stories with Canadians, and Ontarians especially, and particularly our youth. The memories my uncle shared with us were remarkable and they moulded much of our understanding of the real sacrifices that young Canadians made during those war years.

The McGuinty government has provided \$100,000 to hold veteran appreciation days in partnership with the Dominion Institute so that these very important stories will continue—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Dave Levac: Thank you to the minister for starting to tell us about what else is happening beyond Remembrance Day. I'm sure that Ontarians generally and also the veterans and their families will be pleased to hear that the government does indeed support events that honour our veterans not just on Remembrance Day, but throughout the year.

You also mentioned in particular the importance of engaging our young people. As a former educator, I made it a point to ensure that our schools were involved in participating in Remembrance Day ceremonies, and also, in the school or outside of the school, anytime we had an opportunity to honour our veterans, so that they learned about the service and sacrifice. Many of the kids that I taught were of the age where people actually lied about their age to serve in the war: 14-, 15- and 16-year-olds.

We must continue to show our veterans that we want to protect those freedoms that we have and enjoy today. Can the minister explain what the government is doing to engage the public, and especially our young people, so that they can better understand and appreciate our province's proud history?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: Again, I thank my colleague. What is important, I think, to share with the Legislature is that in addition to the \$100,000 that the McGuinty government is giving to the Dominion Institute, there will be an additional \$150,000 given to them through the Ontario Trillium Foundation, again for the institute's veteran appreciation project. This project, as my colleague has mentioned, will engage thousands of community members over the next two years, including educators, students, libraries, Legion branches and veterans' associations. The project encourages these groups to compile the important stories of our veterans from their communities so that they can create a unique online resource for all Ontarians.

Le projet d'appréciation des anciens combattants aidera à bâtir un héritage durable pour les Ontariens, notamment les jeunes. Il permettra d'assurer que les sacrifices de nos combattants—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mrs. Julia Munro: My question is to the Minister of Energy. Residents of my riding are concerned about the peaker plant which your government has ordered built in northern York region. We have now found out that you have added Bradford to the list of proposed sites. How many more proposed locations in my riding will you add to your list? And since you are adding more sites, why will you not restart the local consultation process with people in my riding?

Hon. George Smitherman: I want to thank the honourable member for the question. We do have a responsibility to provide a reliable supply of electricity to all residents in Ontario and to the high-growth area of northern York region, where hospitals like South Lake, as an example, have grown exponentially as a result of investments from our government.

With respect to the process that the Ontario Power Authority is running, proponents are given the opportunity to select sites. I don't do that. In the case of the site that the honourable member mentions, that came forward from a proponent. The opportunity for proponents to propose sites has ended. I believe there are six, and more information will be forthcoming soon about those six that have made application to be considered as the site for a peaking plant, the advantage of which is that it can meet the demand that is there on particularly cold or particularly hot days when there's behaviour on the part of our constituents that seeks additional electricity use.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Julia Munro: The Ontario Clean Air Alliance says that your proposed plant will use the least efficient gas technology to generate power and that its greenhouse gas emission rate will be double that of a high-efficiency, natural-gas-fired plant. Will you tell my constituents exactly what emissions this plant will put into our air and precisely what effect these emissions will have on our local environment and health?

Hon. George Smitherman: Considering especially that any emissions with respect to any form of gas-fired plant are so substantially below those related to coal, we can tell your constituents right from the starting point that the net impact in improvement is very, very beneficial indeed.

We have to recognize that northern York region has a peaker plant headed there to meet the needs of the people because the same communities overall rejected reinforcements to the transmission grid and they are a growing area with rates of growth about three times the average in the province of Ontario.

I do believe that the relative efficiency has to do with the amount of time that such a plant would run. These are plants that are designed to respond to the demand; that is, when people flip the switch as they demand air conditioning, or heating in particularly cold winter weather. But I'd be very, very happy to get even more environ-

mental information to the member so that she can distribute it to her constituents.

1130

RETIREMENT HOMES

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre responsable des aînées, the minister responsible for seniors. It has been almost two years since the government finished consulting Ontarians on regulating the care provided in retirement homes, yet Ontarians have seen no improvement. In these consultations, stakeholders called on the province to establish mandatory province-wide standards of care and create an independent agency that could enforce these standards.

Since taking on the responsibility of seniors' issues, why hasn't the minister taken any action to regulate the care provided in retirement homes?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: I thank the honourable member for her question. In fact, we have taken considerable action and have been very preoccupied with the file, both within my ministry and the secretariat and in conjunction with the minister and his Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

Actually, I'm quite pleased with the progress and looking forward very much to what will be announced in the months ahead, and I think the honourable member will be pleased with the outcome of our work and discussions.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: As it stands today—I mean, on September 7, 2007, just before we ran for election, the McGuinty government had a press release that said we could expect retirement homes to be regulated. It is now November 2008 and care in retirement homes in Ontario is completely unregulated.

Especially with the government's new initiative encouraging vulnerable alternate-level-of-care patients to move from hospitals to retirement homes, we need to have clear standards of care. This government knows that there are problems in unregulated retirement homes. She has the solution; she should address the issue. Yet Ontario seniors have seen no action. We've seen empty promises.

I ask again: When will the minister share with seniors and with this member, and take action to regulate the care—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: I'm well aware of when the process began here within the McGuinty government. In fact, I have a copy of the very news release to which the honourable member makes reference.

One has to move forward with considerable study and with considerable consultation. There was extensive consultation with the stakeholders, with seniors, with organizations. In fact, I have a meeting shortly after question period and we'll be meeting with very important stakeholders in this regard.

I'm quite comfortable with where we are. I think the House will be equally comfortable as we move forward with exactly the outcome of all of this work.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Minister, as you know, I represent a large downtown riding and I have the pleasure of hearing from many new Canadians, especially foreign-trained medical professionals. On a regular basis, I hear from them about the issue of capacity in our health care system. As my constituents in Ottawa Centre can attest, these individuals are eager to begin to practise medicine in Ontario at a time when we need to increase capacity in our health care system.

While I know that our government has made tremendous investments in the health care sector since 2003 to increase capacity in our medical schools and the health care system, my constituents were surprised to learn about the bill we have introduced to address the issue of foreign-trained medical professionals.

Could the minister please highlight for us how Bill 97, if passed, will assist foreign-trained medical professionals?

Hon. David Caplan: It's an excellent question, and I want to thank the member from Ottawa Centre for his advocacy.

Our government has more than doubled international medical graduate spaces. There are currently over 630 IMGs training in Ontario, and over 1,000 foreign-trained doctors have entered into practice in Ontario since 2003. In fact, in Ottawa, that number is currently 431 physicians.

But there are barriers to registration to practise for internationally educated health care providers, and they do persist. That's why Bill 97 was introduced. If passed, it would change the mandate of all of Ontario's 23 regulated health professional colleges to acknowledge that access to health care is a matter of public interest.

The bill does not, however, place full responsibility of access on regulatory changes; rather, it acknowledges the vital role they play in helping us to implement solutions—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Minister, for that information. My constituents in Ottawa Centre will be pleased to hear that we are working hard in our efforts to harness the skills and talents of these internationally trained professionals.

Minister, you mentioned specifically that our government is working closely with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario to address the issue of foreign-trained medical professionals. Along with our investments in the health care sector, working in partnership with health care organizations is certainly a positive way to address this issue of increasing capacity in our health care system.

One other organization that I hear from on a regular basis is the Ontario Medical Association. I understand that our government recently signed an agreement with the OMA. Could the minister please share with this House how the recently signed agreement with the OMA will benefit Ontarians and our health care system?

Hon. David Caplan: The member is astute to point out the recent agreement that was signed with the Ontario Medical Association because this agreement is an important part of our government's plan to improve access to family health care and to reduce wait times in our emergency departments. The agreement provides incentives for family physicians in partnership with the government—and this is especially important because it's the first time that we have been able to achieve this—to attach a minimum of half a million unattached patients within three years of ratification of the agreement. It includes a new program that will defer interest on medical resident debt. It will fund up to 500 nurses, making it easier for doctors and nurses to work together in family practice. It provides doctors with the tools they need to help their patients better manage their chronic conditions by using an online registry and self-help tools. It also increases access to community mental health services for high-risk patients.

This new agreement reflects the common vision shared by our government and by the province's doctors on how to improve health care for all Ontarians.

TIME ALLOCATION

Mr. Frank Klees: On a point of order: I want to raise an issue with you that I believe concerns every member of this Legislature. It relates to the government's handling of Bill 114.

Earlier in question period, the member from Durham raised the issue that on this bill the deadline for amendments was actually in advance of the date of the public hearing. Those public hearings took place this morning; clause-by-clause is taking place this afternoon.

We know that the purpose of public hearings is to provide stakeholders and members of this House with an opportunity to make input into legislation so that amendments can then be formulated as a result of those public hearings. For the government to have drawn a deadline for amendments to be submitted before the public hearings can even take place, that makes a farce of the process.

I would ask that you consider this issue and that you rule on whether it is appropriate for the government to consider amendments before the public and members of this Legislature have even had an opportunity to make their submission. I understand fully that the government inserted that right into its closure motion, that this place voted on that and that the government has a majority. I understand that. What I want to point out, however, is that notwithstanding the government's majority, to deal in this way with the privileges of a member of this Legis-

lature is undermining our role in this place, and it is wrong. It should never be done again.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I submit it's not a point of order, and I would submit that it's not one which requires you to rule, but that is at your discretion. I will echo what the Deputy Premier said, which is that we undertake to work through the House leaders if there is in fact anything appropriate that needs to be done. We will do that, and that is the form in which that ought to be worked out.

Mr. John O'Toole: On the same point of order: I would support the observations by Mr. Klees based on my participation in the committee hearing this morning, where even the input for a question was denied. I think it is a good review for you and the table, and I look forward to an objective look at the legitimacy of that time allocation motion.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I want to thank the members who spoke on this point of order. As we all know, this was an order of the House that was put forth as a motion and was voted on by this House. The requirements for the filing deadline were established by the decision of the House, thus forming an order of the House.

It was not a point of order, but I do remind the member that that motion that had been put on the floor was an amendable motion and that any member of this House could have brought forward an amendment.

DEFERRED VOTES

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA SÉCURITÉ PROFESSIONNELLE ET L'ASSURANCE CONTRE LES ACCIDENTS DU TRAVAIL

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We have a deferred vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 119, An Act to Amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1140 to 1151.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour will rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia
Albanese, Laura
Arthurs, Wayne
Balkissoon, Bas
Bartolucci, Rick
Bentley, Christopher
Best, Margaret
Bisson, Gilles
Brotten, Laurel C.
Bryant, Michael

Fonseca, Peter
Gerretsen, John
Gélinas, France
Gravelle, Michael
Hampton, Howard
Horwath, Andrea
Hoy, Pat
Jaczek, Helena
Kormos, Peter
Leal, Jeff

Oraziotti, David
Pendergast, Leeanna
Phillips, Gerry
Prue, Michael
Pupatello, Sandra
Qaadri, Shafiq
Ramal, Khalil
Rinaldi, Lou
Sandals, Liz
Sergio, Mario

Cansfield, Donna H.
Caplan, David
Carroll, Aileen
Colle, Mike
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe
DiNovo, Cheri
Duguid, Brad
Flynn, Kevin Daniel

Levac, Dave
Mangat, Amrit
Marchese, Rosario
McMeekin, Ted
Meilleur, Madeleine
Miller, Paul
Milloy, John
Mitchell, Carol
Moridi, Reza
Naqvi, Yasir

Smith, Monique
Smitherman, George
Sousa, Charles
Tabuns, Peter
Van Bommel, Maria
Watson, Jim
Wilkinson, John
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ENERGY SYMPOSIUM

Mr. Toby Barrett: As questions and new power proposals continue to surface, I invite all to Jarvis on Thursday, November 20, for a symposium I'm hosting on energy generation and our environment.

Once again, this year's symposium will have a full slate of presenters and exhibits covering all aspects of the energy generation spectrum, from carbon sequestration to natural gas combined cycle power generation, biomass, geothermal, wind power, solar, clean air technology, nuclear and conservation.

Those speaking and presenting will travel to Jarvis from all parts of the province, representing Farmers for Economic Opportunity, Competitive Power Ventures, Ontario Power Generation, Norfolk Energy, the Clean Affordable Energy Alliance, Grand Erie Energy Quest, the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, the Canadian Environmental Law Association, the Canadian Nuclear Workers Council, Bruce Power, as well as individuals.

After writing the Premier twice for answers and requesting consultation with our area residents before energy-generation decisions are made without those being impacted being allowed to have a say, I've taken it upon myself to, yet again, hold the consultation and have the symposium. So I invite all—the Premier, the Minister of Energy and the Minister of the Environment—down to our area for a lively evening.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Peter Kormos: Speaker, my constituency office down in Welland—just like yours, I'll bet you—has been getting phone calls and e-mails from people in shock when they open their assessment notices. The Liberals thought they were oh-so-clever by freezing assessments for two years to carry them through an election without doing anything to fix the problem. So they froze assessments for two years, haven't fixed the problem, and assessment kicks back in. Talk to Bob C.—we'll leave it at that for the moment—down in Port Colborne. He's got an assessment that jumped from \$154,000 to \$191,000.

You have to understand that it's not as if there's a big market down there. Factories are shutting left and right. Workers are losing their jobs, just like in the rest of Ontario. So folks down where I am are mad as all get-out at the Liberals, just like folks where you are, Speaker. They want no more to do with them, because the Liberals have failed homeowners across this province, especially the seniors and people on fixed incomes, for Pete's sake.

New Democrats understand, because we know that market-value assessment is an incredibly flawed process. We didn't like it then, and we don't like it now. The Liberals objected to it when the Conservatives introduced

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed?

Nays

Arnott, Ted
Barrett, Toby
Chickleigh, Ted
Elliott, Christine
Hardeman, Ernie

Hudak, Tim
Jones, Sylvia
Klees, Frank
Miller, Norm
Munro, Julia

O'Toole, John
Savoline, Joyce
Scott, Laurie
Wilson, Jim

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 59; the nays are 14.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to the order of the House dated November 5, 2008, this bill is ordered referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

I'd like to take this opportunity to, and I ask all members to join me, thank this group of pages. Their term has come to an end, and we wish them all the best in their future endeavours.

The business of the morning being concluded, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1154 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. David Caplan: This is Medical Radiation Technologists Week in Ontario, and we have members of the Ontario Association of Medical Radiation Technologists here with us today. I have the pleasure today to welcome to the Legislature Dr. Robin Hesler, Greg Toffner, Eleanor Roppel, Judith Baranowski, Valarie Kelly and Rory Demetriooff. Welcome to Queen's Park, and I hope you enjoy your day here today.

Mr. Dave Levac: Joining us today in the gallery are Mr. Bob Brown and his mother, Susan, from the riding of Brant. Bob is the president of the Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians. With him is his guide dog, Boon. Boon is a Lions International-trained guide dog. He comes from the United States. He doesn't have a working visa, and his master says if he doesn't behave himself, he will send him back home.

Bob joins us today for a charity event and wants to know the workings of the Legislature. I believe it will be the first time a guide dog has been introduced in the House.

it but seem to have embraced it as government. We believe that assessments should be fixed under real market value and survive until the next purchase.

MEDICAL RADIATION TECHNOLOGISTS WEEK

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I rise in the House today to recognize, during the month of November, Medical Radiation Technologists Week in Ontario.

The Ontario Association of Medical Radiation Technologists is the official voice for Ontario's 5,000-plus medical radiation technologists, who provide all of the medical imaging and radiation therapy across the province in hospitals and independent health facilities.

The Ontario Association of Medical Radiation Technologists is the voice of the four health profession specialties in medical radiation technology: radiological technology, radiation therapy, nuclear medicine and magnetic resonance imaging.

There are currently 6,000 medical radiation technologists in Ontario who ensure that patients in Ontario receive quality, effective and efficient health care in our province. Medical radiation technologists are a key focal point in health care and use their skills to help patients receive the diagnostic images that make it possible for physicians and nurses to determine appropriate treatments. Also, MRTs use radiation therapy to treat cancers and diseases, helping Ontarians to live longer and healthier lives. MRTs are certainly one important note that make health care in Ontario a world-class system.

On behalf of MRTs' strong commitment to our patients and for their continuing support for interprofessional collaboration within Ontario's health care system, I rise in the House today to recognize and congratulate medical radiation technologists this week.

CANADIAN BLOOD SERVICES

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise in the House to talk about an important issue that affects people across Ontario. As many of you know, Canadian Blood Services has announced a shortage in their blood supply. In the last two months, the national blood inventory dropped by over 40%. Last week, Canadian Blood Services only had enough blood supply for two days' worth of transfusions.

The reality is that nearly half of Canadians say that they or a family member has needed blood at some time and the demand has been rising over the past several years. One in two Canadians is eligible to give blood but, in the past year, only one in 60 has actually done so, even though just one donation can save up to three lives.

Blood donated in Canada is used every day for routine operations and emergency services. Some cancer patients require up to eight units of blood every week, and up to 50 units of blood may be needed for victims of a car accident.

Yesterday, in response to the call put out by Canadian Blood Services, John Tory and I went with a group of people from Queen's Park to donate blood. The process was simple, quick and incredibly rewarding. It only took less than an hour to give, and it is one of the easiest things we can do to actually save people's lives.

The need is urgent. This isn't something that can wait. I encourage everyone, if you are able to give, please make an appointment and go as soon as possible to ensure that Canadian Blood Services can continue to help those in need.

DOMINIC AGOSTINO

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: Last evening, the late Dominic Agostino, a dear friend to many and former MPP for Hamilton East, was inducted into Hamilton's Gallery of Distinction. With this, Dominic joined 150 other distinguished members who have made a significant contribution to Hamilton. His induction is a fitting tribute to a life lived with unrelenting passion for and inspiring dedication to his family, his friends, his community, Hamilton and his province.

The Gallery of Distinction itself has done great things for Hamilton. It has presented to Hamiltonians of all backgrounds the stories of a series of inspiring individuals who have made their city the wonderful place it is today.

Dominic Agostino's portrait and biography will now hang at the Hamilton Convention Centre. For those who knew him, it will serve as a reminder of the great things he accomplished and the energy he brought to Hamilton. For those who did not, it will tell a story that with hard work and dedication to your community, combined with a strong vision and enthusiasm, great things are possible.

LIBERAL LEADERSHIP

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I rise today to talk about leadership. The republic to the south just elected a new leader. Despite what you think of his policies, Barack Obama has those qualities that make great leaders. He has fresh ideas, a bold vision and the courage to create change. Compare that to the current leadership of this Liberal government. It is a bleak contrast.

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Great leaders shine during periods of transition. They adapt, they bring innovative ideas and they do what's right, even if it means admitting their mistakes. Poor leaders shrink away from responsibility. They blame others, stubbornly hold on to old ideas and evade questions. I'll leave it to the people of Ontario to decide what kind of leadership the McGuinty government is providing.

Ontario's economy is in a painful flux. Just today we heard about hundreds more job losses at Navistar in Chatham and at CAMI in Ingersoll. We wish that we could give hope to those working families, that we could provide them with leadership during hard times. I wish

we could show them a recovery plan. But this government is so mired in self-righteousness that they refuse to change. The Premier is so married to his talking points that he won't acknowledge the crisis before us.

Faced with huge obstacles, Barack Obama shouted, "Yes, we can." Faced with the need for economic leadership, Dalton McGuinty says, "No, we won't."

REFOREST LONDON

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I would like to honour the efforts and success of ReForest London, an organization that is helping London keep its reputation as the Forest City. Along with the Glen Cairn Community Resource Centre, ReForest London is planting 1,000 trees at schools, businesses, parks and other public areas in the Glen Cairn neighbourhood.

These trees will have a significant impact on our air quality and property values. Just as importantly, they will generate community pride and reduce global warming.

Last weekend, I joined community volunteers in Thompson Park to plant 400 native trees and shrubs. The spirit of community at the event was so great.

Over the next two weekends, ReForest London, along with youth from Glen Cairn community centre, will plant 100 trees in yards throughout the city of London. Next spring, they will host a discount tree sale.

In response to this initiative, the city of London will also plant 100 trees alongside the boulevards in London.

This Re-leaf Project was funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation, TD Friends of the Environment Foundation and an Evergreen grant. I would like to thank them and all the participants for their great efforts to maintain our image in the city of London as the Forest City.

THANK-A-VET LUNCHEON

Mr. Dave Levac: I wish to bring to the attention of the House a great annual event held in the riding of Brant for over 18 years. It's called the Thank-A-Vet Luncheon.

In its new format since 1998, local veterans, spouses and widows and widowers from Brant, Brantford and Six Nations/New Credit have been invited as honoured guests to enjoy a delicious hot meal, greetings from various dignitaries, music from the era and a time to share and renew friendships. On November 1, this luncheon saw over 675 guests being honoured as a small way of expressing our community's gratitude for their sacrifices.

I had the honour of chairing this committee from 1999 to 2004. This year's co-chairs, Scott Clare and Bill Chopp, and vice co-chairs, Heather Gaukel and Mike Rafferty, deserve kudos for a great event. Check out www.thank-a-vet.ca.

With the assistance and participation of all levels of government, the private sector, schools and individuals, enough funds were raised to make this a free event for our cherished veterans.

This, to our knowledge, is the largest event of its kind in Canada. To each and every supporter of this luncheon—the volunteer servers; the caterer, Sherwood Inn; students; donors of in-kind services; monetary donors; and particularly the 56th Field Regiment and the organizing committee—we say thank you.

Finally, we do say to our veterans everywhere, "We will remember."

ORDER OF CIVIL MERIT

Mr. David Zimmer: Yesterday, I attended an event at the Korean Consulate here in Toronto. At that event, two distinguished Canadian Koreans who reside here in Toronto received awards.

Mr. Raymond Cho, a Toronto city councillor, received the award from the Republic of Korea: the Order of Civil Merit for his distinguished service to the Korean Canadian community. Also receiving an award was the For You Telecare Family Service. It is a Canadian Korean family services agency. Mrs. Lee accepted the award on behalf of that organization.

The award is given by the Republic of Korea through the President of the Republic to a number of very distinguished Korean Canadians every year who have made a contribution to the Canadian Korean community, and I'm very pleased to be able to recognize those members and that organization in this chamber today.

WEARING OF PINS

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I believe we have reached unanimous consent for each member to wear a pin in recognition of World Diabetes Day.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AMENDMENT ACT (INDUSTRIAL FACILITIES), 2008 LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA PROTECTION DE L'ENVIRONNEMENT (INSTALLATIONS INDUSTRIELLES)

Mr. Levac moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 125, An Act to amend the Environmental Protection Act to regulate industrial facilities that use, store or treat hazardous materials / Projet de loi 125, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la protection de l'environnement pour réglementer les installations industrielles où sont utilisés, entreposés ou traités des matériaux dangereux.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Dave Levac: This bill, if passed, amends the Environmental Protection Act by requiring that industrial facilities that regularly use, store or treat significant amounts of hazardous materials prepare and submit every five years a publicly available environmental report on their property. A facility that ceases operations will be required to submit a final environmental report. Owners of the industrial facilities will be required to be responsible for any environmental damage that occurs on their land while under their care. This speaks specifically to eradicating brownfields forever.

PETITIONS

CHILD CARE

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services has launched a blatant attack on our province's grandparents raising their at-risk grandchildren by cutting off access to the temporary care assistance program;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislature call on the minister to overturn her July 2008 directives outlining the temporary care assistance program and grant all grandparents raising their at-risk grandchildren access to this much-needed financial support."

I agree with this petition and I will affix my name thereto and hand it to page Willem.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services has launched a blatant attack on our province's grandparents raising their at-risk grandchildren by cutting off access to the temporary care assistance program;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislature call on the minister to overturn her July 2008 directives outlining the temporary care assistance program and grant all grandparents raising their at-risk grandchildren access to this much-needed financial support."

I agree with this petition and hereby affix my name to it, and page Emma will bring it down.

HOSPICES

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas hospices on church or hospital property do not pay taxes;

"Whereas hospices are not-for-profit organizations providing emotional, spiritual and bereavement support and respite care to terminally ill individuals and their family members;

"Whereas a residential hospice (usually an eight-to-10 bed home-like facility) provides around-the-clock care to terminally ill individuals and support to their families;

"Whereas hospice services are provided free of charge;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to allow hospices across the province to be exempt from municipal taxes."

I affix my signature and ask the page to carry it for me.

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CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have a petition today from constituents in the riding of Peterborough in support of the private member's bill of the member from Niagara Falls, Bill 33.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents, as requested in Bill 33, put forward by MPP Kim Craiton.

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

I agree with this petition, will affix my signature to it and give it to page Chloe.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Milton District Hospital was designed to serve a population of 30,000 people and the town of Milton is now home to more than 69,000 people and is still growing rapidly; and

"Whereas the town of Milton is the fastest-growing town in Canada and was forced into that rate of growth by an act of the Ontario Legislature called 'Places to Grow'; and

"Whereas the town of Milton is projected to have a population of 101,600 people in 2014, which is the earliest date an expansion could be completed; and

"Whereas the current Milton facility is too small to accommodate Milton's explosive growth and parts of the hospital prohibit the integration of new outpatient clinics and diagnostic technologies;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure take the necessary steps to ensure timely approval and construction of the expansion to Milton District Hospital."

I agree with this petition, and I'm glad to sign my name. I pass it to my page Faye.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly that contains the signatures of people from Mississauga, Oakville, Georgetown and Brampton, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I'm pleased to affix my signature and support this petition, and ask page Laura to carry it for me on her last day with us here.

CHILD PROTECTION

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Whereas Ontario is one of the few provinces that does not have independent oversight of child welfare administration; and

"Whereas eight provinces now have independent oversight of child welfare issues, including child protection; and

"Whereas all provincial Ombudsmen first identified child protection as a priority issue in 1986 and still Ontario does not allow the Ombudsman to investigate people's complaints about children's aid societies' decisions; and

"Whereas people wronged by CAS decisions concerning placement, access, custody or care are not allowed to appeal those decisions to the Ontario Ombudsman's office;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we support the Ombudsman having the power to probe decisions and investigate complaints concerning the province's children's aid societies."

I have signed this and give it to my page Helen.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services has launched a blatant attack on our province's grandparents raising their at-risk grandchildren by cutting off access to the temporary care assistance program;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislature call on the minister to overturn her July 2008 directives outlining the temporary care assistance program and grant all grandparents raising their at-risk grandchildren access to this much-needed financial support."

I support this petition and will give it to page Willem.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition addressed to the Parliament of Ontario, signed by a number of people within the Polish church in Mississauga on Cawthra Road, that I'd like to read. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the legacy of Pope John Paul II reflects his lifelong commitment to international understanding, peace and the defence of equality and human rights;

"Whereas his legacy has an all-embracing meaning that is particularly relevant to Canada's multi-faith and multicultural traditions;

"Whereas, as one of the great spiritual leaders of contemporary times, Pope John Paul II visited Ontario during his pontificate of more than 25 years and, on his visits, was enthusiastically greeted by Ontario's diverse religious and cultural communities;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to grant speedy passage into law of the

private member's bill An Act to proclaim Pope John Paul II Day."

I'm pleased to join with my colleague in Newmarket-Aurora in supporting this petition, and I'll ask page Jenna to carry it for me.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the current Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital is fully utilized; and

"Whereas Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital was sized to serve a town of Oakville population of 130,000, and the current population is now well over 170,000; and

"Whereas the population of Oakville continues to grow as mandated by 'Places to Grow,' an act of the Ontario Legislature, and is projected to be 187,500 in 2012, the completion date for a new facility in the original time frame; and

"Whereas residents of the town of Oakville are entitled to the same quality of health care as all Ontarians; and

"Whereas hospital facilities in the surrounding area do not have capacity to absorb Oakville's overflow needs;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure take the necessary steps to ensure the new Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital be completed under its original timelines without further delay."

I agree with this petition. I'm pleased to sign my name and pass it to my page Meagan.

ONTARIO SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition from the good citizens on Fairlawn Avenue in my riding, the Provincial Animal Welfare Act petition.

"Whereas the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act has not been updated since 1919;

"Whereas Bill 50 would require all veterinarians to report suspected abuse and neglect, protecting veterinarians from liability;

"Whereas it would allow the OSPCA to inspect and investigate places where animals are kept;

"Whereas the bill would prohibit the training of animals to fight;

"Whereas Bill 50 would allow the OSPCA to inspect roadside zoos;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 50, entitled the Provincial Animal Welfare Act, 2008, to protect our animal friends."

I support the good people on Fairlawn Avenue and I put my name to the petition.

BEER RETAILING AND DISTRIBUTION

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the current system, practice and arrangement of retailing and distributing beer in the province of Ontario—and more specifically, the 'near monopoly' of The Beer Store—severely restricts the accessibility, convenience and choice for retail consumers of beer in Ontario; and

"Whereas The Beer Store 'near monopoly' is controlled by 'for-profit, foreign-owned companies' and these companies are not accountable to the people of Ontario, and these companies do not act in the best interests of the people of Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That legislation be introduced that will permit the retailing and distribution of beer through alternative and additional grocery and supermarket retail channels that will fairly compete with The Beer Store, thereby allowing an accessible, convenient, safe, well-regulated and environmentally responsible retailing environment for beer to become established in the province of Ontario."

I agree with this petition and I'm glad to sign my name and pass it to my page Elise.

1330

LUPUS

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm pleased to join with my seatmate, the indefatigable member from Niagara Falls, to read this petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It read as follows:

"Whereas systemic lupus erythematosus is under-recognized as a global health problem by public health professionals and governments, driving the need for greater awareness; and

"Whereas medical research on lupus and efforts to develop safer and more effective therapies for the disease are underfunded in comparison with diseases of comparable magnitude and severity; and

"Whereas no new safe and effective drugs for lupus have been introduced in more than 40 years. Current drugs for lupus are very toxic and can cause other life-threatening health problems that can be worse than the primary disease;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to assist financially with media campaigns to bring about knowledge of systemic lupus erythematosus and the signs and symptoms of this disease to all citizens of Ontario.

"We further petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide funding for research currently being undertaken in lupus clinics throughout Ontario."

On behalf of my seatmate, I'm pleased to sign this petition and to ask page Laura on her last day with us to carry it for me.

GASOLINE PRICES

Ms. Laurie Scott: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the skyrocketing price of gasoline is causing hardship to families across Ontario; and

“Whereas the McGuinty Liberal government charges a gasoline tax of 14.7 cents per litre to drivers in all parts of Ontario; and

“Whereas gasoline tax revenues now go exclusively to big cities with transit systems, while roads and bridges crumble in other communities across Ontario; and

“Whereas residents of rural communities in Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock have been shut out of provincial gasoline tax revenues to which they have contributed; and

“Whereas whatever one-time money that has flowed to municipalities from the McGuinty Liberal government has been neither stable nor predictable, and has been insufficient to meet our infrastructure needs;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to redistribute provincial gasoline tax revenues fairly to all communities across the province.”

These signatures were sent from my community of Galway-Cavendish-Harvey.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): There appearing to be no further petitions, the time for petitions has ended.

PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESSDIABETES AWARENESS MONTH
ACT, 2008LOI DE 2008 SUR LE MOIS
DE LA SENSIBILISATION
AU DIABÈTE

Mrs. Mangat moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 113, An Act to proclaim the month of November Diabetes Awareness Month in Ontario / Projet de loi 113, Loi visant à proclamer le mois de novembre Mois de la sensibilisation au diabète.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to standing order 97, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: It is indeed an honour to rise and present my first private member's bill for second reading. Each member of this House has the privilege of being able to introduce legislation that can, if passed, help to shape the Ontario that we all love. Today, I bring forward legislation entitled Bill 113, Diabetes Awareness Month, which I believe will raise awareness about the serious nature of the disease known as diabetes.

Diabetes is often diagnosed when one's pancreas is unable to produce sufficient levels of insulin, the hormone that enables the body to control glucose levels in

the blood. There are three main types of diabetes. Type 1 diabetes is typically diagnosed in childhood or early adolescence. Type 2 diabetes generally develops in adults over the age of 40, but lately an increasing number of children are being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. Gestational diabetes is a temporary condition that occurs during pregnancy. Complications resulting from diabetes can lead to heart attack, stroke, kidney disease and blindness. In extreme cases, it can even lead to the amputation of limbs.

The statistics are clear: 246 million people worldwide are affected by diabetes. Nationwide, over two million Canadians are living with the disease. In Ontario, 900,000 people, that is, 8.8% of our population, are living with diabetes, and it is expected that this number will grow to 1.2 million by 2010.

Diabetes is now the sixth leading cause of death in Ontario and costs Ontario's health care system over \$5 billion a year. Evidence confirms that food habits of different communities predicate and define the incidence of diabetes. This disease affects certain cultural communities at higher rates compared to others. Statistics show that diabetes rates are 30% among South Asians, aboriginals, Hispanics, Asians and African Canadians.

As a preventive measure, it is essential that we increase awareness about diabetes and work to develop programs and services aimed at decreasing and preventing the incidence of this serious disease.

The statistics about diabetes are telling. However, the real story comes from those who live with the disease and their families. This summer, at my community barbecue, I met Deborah Gibson, a constituent of mine, who told me about her son Trevor, who was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes at the age of three. Trevor learned at a very early age the serious effects of diabetes. Growing up, Trevor had to carefully balance his food intake and exercise, and often required as many as six blood glucose tests a day and five insulin injections. For Trevor, this meant that he was unable to take part in many of the activities that his peers took for granted.

It is my hope that a month dedicated to diabetes awareness will help educate those who do not have the disease about some of the challenges that diabetics like Trevor face on a daily basis. Due to lack of awareness of the seriousness of diabetes, some children with this disease have been denied orange juice to address their glucose needs during class, and there are others who have been left alone to test their blood glucose in a school washroom or closet.

Trevor received an insulin pump in 2006, and I'm happy to report that it improved his quality of life dramatically, as it made it easier for him to manage the disease.

Trevor and his mother, Debbie, are here with us today, so I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Trevor and his mother for their endurance, determination and for being a role model to others living with diabetes.

The exact causes of diabetes are unknown. However, based on the evidence, we know that lifestyle changes

can help prevent or delay the onset of diabetes, and people can live long, healthy and happy lives. The key to fighting diabetes is timely awareness and prevention. If children are taught the benefits of a healthy diet and physical activity at an early age, diabetes can often be avoided later in life. By changing a diet, an adult with diabetes can dramatically improve his or her quality of life.

Take, for example, Siva Swaminathan. Siva was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes in 2005. By changing her diet and lifestyle, she was able to improve her health. Since then, she has been a dedicated advocate for diabetes awareness. In addition to being the chair of the South Asian diabetes chapter, Siva has used her culinary training to design healthy meal plans for diabetics. Siva hosts "how to cook healthier" workshops for South Asian women. Siva Swaminathan is one of Ontario's great community heroes who brings hope to those affected by diabetes.

It is my hope that by declaring November as Diabetes Awareness Month in Ontario, we can help educate children about the potential long-term effects that can result from an unhealthy lifestyle. I believe that by encouraging our young people to make healthy choices at an early age, we can reduce the number of people diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. This will encourage people to understand the serious nature of diabetes and the effects it has not only on those who have the disease but on their families and on society as a whole.

1340

Shawn Shephard was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes in 1997, but instead of letting this disease beat him, he decided to fight back. He has since become a motivational speaker dedicated to diabetes awareness. Shawn is so passionate that he has successfully run three marathons and five half marathons in support of the Canadian Diabetes Association and diabetes awareness.

This bill will help Ontarians understand some of the early symptoms and risk factors associated with diabetes. These include high blood pressure, pre-existing cardiovascular conditions and a family history of diabetes. I'm very proud of the steps this government has taken in helping to ensure that those living with diabetes can enjoy a higher quality of life. Expanding the province's insulin pump plan, creating a new electronic diabetes registry and several education programs demonstrate this government's commitment to helping diabetics manage their condition. But it is important that we do not stop there. We must continue to raise awareness of the disease and promote appropriate care and prevention. This is why I have brought this bill forward.

I would like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of the staff and volunteers of the Canadian Diabetes Association, who work tirelessly to advocate for increased awareness surrounding diabetes. I can tell you that their passion for this issue is truly inspiring. Many volunteers from the Canadian Diabetes Association are seated in the public gallery today. I would like to take a moment to recognize and thank them for their continued

dedication to diabetes awareness throughout Ontario and throughout Canada.

I conclude by asking each member of this Legislature to support this bill, as I believe we owe it to the 900,000 Ontarians living with diabetes and the families who support them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I appreciate the opportunity this afternoon to speak on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus with respect to Bill 113, An Act to proclaim the month of November Diabetes Awareness Month in Ontario. I certainly want to say, from the outset, that I appreciate the member from Mississauga-Brampton South's bringing this forward. I can tell from her opening remarks that she views this as a tool in bringing some more awareness about the disease of diabetes that will bring forward what can be done to prevent, manage, treat and live with diabetes. We from the PC caucus certainly welcome the bill and fully support it.

I have nursed for over 20 years, and I can tell you that since I have been in the Legislature we've had many discussions about diabetes and have worked with the Canadian Diabetes Association. We certainly appreciate that information advocacy being brought forward. I've actually learned a lot more about diabetes from them than in the hustle-bustle of nursing—you had certain parameters and it was very technical. Since I've been in the Legislature and learning from the Canadian Diabetes Association advocates in my riding, I have learned a lot more, especially on advocacy and how we can make changes. I thank them for that.

Bill 113 draws attention to the fact that for the 900,000 Ontarians living with diabetes, it's a daily reality. The further reality is the fact that the number is projected to increase to 1.2 million people in the next two years. That would be approximately 10% of Ontario's population—significant, to say the least. When the Canadian Diabetes Association had their luncheon at lunch time, which I appreciate them hosting, it was a special event, and I was able to meet more of their members. But the inspiration and the volunteers that they brought forward—I think they had 55 people with diabetes there who were volunteers today—to come out and be advocates for people living with diabetes and the changes they'd like to see—I know Catherine Millen and Anne Rink, who are from my riding, are in the gallery, and also the member from Peterborough, if I can introduce your guest, if that's OK? Islay Bromley is from Ennismore. They're recognized here, as well the many other members who are in the galleries this afternoon.

There are many consequences that people living with diabetes incur: the heart attacks, strokes and kidney failures. November is kind of unofficially Diabetes Awareness Month, so this bill gives it that official status.

Earlier this week, I know many members of the Legislature went to attend the Optometrists of Ontario reception at Queen's Park, and we had high-density pictures taken of our eyes. One of the reasons for this test is that it

can help diagnose symptoms of a number of other potential health concerns, including diabetes. I know that in my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, the Lindsay and district branch of the Canadian Diabetes Association we have there does a wonderful job of raising awareness, raising the funds and raising the spirits when it comes to diabetes. The co-chairs there now are Katherine Forgaard-Pullen and Nancy Pullen-Howe, and they certainly have a busy month planned. I take the opportunity to say they're having a bake sale in support of the Canadian Diabetes Association at the Lindsay Square mall this Saturday; the Diabetes Health Fair on November 13, with Dr. Garth Hanson as the keynote speaker; the Unite for Diabetes and Celebration of World Diabetes Day on November 14 at the Ross Memorial Hospital in Lindsey, where they'll be serving diabetes-friendly cake and coffee; the Coffee for a Cure event on November 21, another great fundraiser for the association; and the Health Check Clinic on November 28 for blood pressure and blood glucose tests by the First Health Team of Ross Memorial Hospital. They're all great events that help raise the awareness of this cause. I know my colleague from Peterborough and I also share the Peterborough branch of the Canadian Diabetes Association, which does great work in our ridings.

Cementing diabetes awareness by officially declaring November as Diabetes Awareness Month, as Bill 113 suggests, will certainly help enhance consciousness about Ontarians at risk. November 14 is recognized by the United Nations as World Diabetes Day. Some of us are wearing, and we have unanimous consent to wear the pin in the Legislature, that nice blue circle. That was the resolution by the UN General Assembly, which I have here. It's dated January 18, 2007. Events throughout the world will be held, and I'm proud to say many in our province and in my riding, to recognize that special day on November 14.

The aim of the World Diabetes Day campaign includes raising awareness of the warning signs of diabetes, encouraging initiatives to reduce diabetes and distributing materials to support these initiatives and promoting healthy lifestyles to help prevent type 2 diabetes in children. One of the key messages of the 2008 campaign says the following: "Diabetes brings different challenges at different ages." Another key message is: "People with diabetes, including children, can live full, healthy and productive lives." I agree, and we met a number of these very people this afternoon at the reception.

One of the key points we have of living full, healthy and productive lives is access to care and access to medical tools, such as the insulin pump and supplies that those with diabetes need. I know that Catherine's son has had an insulin pump and the great change in lifestyle that that has brought for him as he's gone through university and pursued his career of choice. I think that those are wonderful personal stories that we can bring forward to say that was the right decision we made in the Legislature to help first children 18 years of age and younger, and now, this afternoon in the gallery, we had the first adult to

receive the insulin pump. Those are our accomplishments that I think we can all be proud of in the Legislature.

Earlier this year—I know that other members will be aware of this—I received a number of e-mails and letters from constituents to expand the free insulin pumps to those living with type 1 diabetes over the age of 18. As I said, when the lady was here today, it was a great moment for us.

1350

I know that my colleague the member from Waterloo, the critic of the Ministry of Health, along with myself are going to be watching the government and the Minister of Health closely. I teased him a bit at the lunch about their diabetes strategy, and we'll be watching closely to make sure that the timelines and deadlines for his diabetes strategy do move forward.

Another matter we're certainly going to be watching is the electronic health recording and e-health system, which is critical to chronic disease management and, in our view, must be a priority in order to deal with wait times and proper access to care. The Ontario Health Quality Council suggests that the province needs to speed up the implementation of electronic health records to better manage patient care.

The statistics show that some 20% of instances in emergency, especially the wait times and all that, are caused by people not taking their medications properly. If electronic medical records can help with that, you can see that a patient's life is going to be enhanced and visits to the emergency room are going to be down. But when they come to the emergency room, we can get on top of the problems they're having more quickly and treat them appropriately, because it's very hard to diagnose without an appropriate list of the medications people are taking.

We are a little concerned about the 150 promised family health teams, and that now, with the projected deficit of \$500 million, some of the health teams are going to be slowed in their progression. I've been a big advocate of family health teams; community health centres in our ridings; access to primary care with multi-disciplinary teams, whether they be nurses, nurse practitioners, social workers or chiropractors; and diabetes clinics that come in. Certainly, we'll need to be taking that forward and watching that closer, because in rural Ontario especially, we certainly have a lot of orphan patients, as we call them—patients without doctors and without access to medical care.

In respect to chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and arthritis, they affect over 30% of the Ontario population—one in every three people. So it's fair to say that a chronic disease strategy is of great benefit to all the people of Ontario, but also to the Ministry of Health and to the budget, because, if I can put on my health promotion hat for a moment, prevention and education are key.

It's very hard in politics. The life cycle is shorter than is really needed to implement a lot of the health needs we have, education and prevention being just two. So it's very important that we look at this at all levels. We're

enhancing people's lives. We've come this far with the diabetes strategy management, with the insulin pumps with the under 18 and over 18 with the chronic disease strategy.

The numbers projected, going forward, are large. We're going to have to get on top of it. I think we all have to take our partisan hats off and see how we can manage with programs in the Ministry of Health that help all the community groups, the volunteers and the people living with different chronic diseases—we're highlighting diabetes here today. That's how you move forward with those things.

I know there is an awareness campaign going on right now for treating children with diabetes in school, and how sometimes they are not allowed to take advantage of all the school programs that are available because of their diabetes. We can highlight things like that and maybe work with the school boards or volunteer parents so that children, in this case with diabetes, are not prevented from going on those extracurricular activities or extra programs offered by these schools.

Preventing diabetes from developing is important. Treating existing cases is crucial. That's why we need immediate steps, going forward, for the Canadian Diabetes Association to assist people living with diabetes and those yet to be diagnosed, with statistics showing that a huge group of people are yet to be diagnosed with diabetes.

It's been a great privilege for me to speak today to the bill that has been brought forward by the member from Mississauga-Brampton South. I want to end with a Canadian Diabetes Association quote: "For those who have diabetes, if they take action now to manage the disease, through healthy meal planning, physical activity, smoking cessation and medication when required, they may delay or even prevent the serious complications associated with diabetes."

Let me once again say how important it is to address the diabetes disease that we have in our population and how we can help with the Canadian Diabetes Association.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to rise today to talk about Bill 113, An Act to proclaim the month of November Diabetes Awareness Month in Ontario, an act that was brought forward by the member from Mississauga-Brampton South. I want to congratulate her for bringing this act forward. I certainly support the intent of the bill, which is to make diabetes awareness something as common for every resident of Ontario.

I would also like to thank the Canadian Diabetes Association for the excellent work and leadership they have shown in bringing issues related to diabetes forward. They are a dedicated group of volunteers who work tirelessly in all of our communities throughout Ontario to make sure that the voice of people living or affected with diabetes is heard. I would like to commend the work of Gary O'Connor, their executive director and

a good friend of mine, who has been with the association for the last five years, and who is doing an excellent job.

Certainly, the NDP has been pressing for a free insulin pump for type 1 diabetes for a long time. At the luncheon today, my predecessor, Ms. Shelley Martel, was recognized for her tireless effort to try to bring that forward. For people living with diabetes, it makes a big difference. A friend of mine was able to get the insulin pump. For the first time in her life, she's able to sleep in in the morning with everybody else on Saturday. For the first time in her life, she's able to have a late dinner with the rest of us, not having to worry. Some people with diabetes did that kind of behaviour before, but it was always with dire consequences. With the insulin pump, this becomes possible and makes for much more of what people know of as a normal life—so certainly, a step in the right direction. An insulin pump is close to \$6,000 just to purchase, and the supplies can run just as much on a yearly basis. For most people, those costs were prohibitive, until now, when it is being covered in Ontario for everybody who needs it.

Another step in the right direction is the new Ontario chronic disease management strategy that focuses on diabetes. As we've heard, there are dire consequences if diabetes is poorly managed. We've talked about people needing dialysis because of kidney failure. We've talked about people having limbs amputated related to diabetes. We talked about strokes and heart attacks, all of these being elevated in people with diabetes. We talked about blindness. But people have to realize that those terrible consequences only happen when diabetes is poorly managed. If you manage it right, then we can prevent those from happening in the first place. This is what the new chronic disease management strategy is all about. It's to help manage the disease so that we prevent those types of very negative consequences from happening.

Everybody knows that the chronic disease management strategy is directly linked to access to interdisciplinary care; that is, when physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses, nutritionists, dietitians, social workers, health promoters, chiropractors—I would add to this optometrists—all work together toward the best practice of managing the care of people with diabetes. Those interdisciplinary teams are found in community health centres, in aboriginal health access centres and in community-governed family health teams.

Unfortunately, in the economic forecast that Minister Duncan released a couple of weeks ago, we know that the implementation of 50 new family health teams has been delayed for a year. This is not good news for people living with diabetes, because in order to provide them with the best practices that will make sure they don't end up with the consequences I've named before, they need access to interdisciplinary teams. If those teams are not in place, those people's health is at risk.

1400

Another population I want to talk about is the aboriginal population, the First Nations, the first people of this province. The rate of diabetes within the First Na-

tions is skyrocketing. In certain age brackets, one in three will develop diabetes. It is rampant.

The best practice to tackle diabetes for our first peoples is through aboriginal health access centres. I have risen in this House time after time, asking the Minister of Health to adequately fund aboriginal health access centres. Right now, those centres are second-class citizens. They don't get the same amount of funding for their physicians, they don't get the same amount of funding for their nurse practitioners, and they can barely afford to hire nutritionists or dietitians because their budgets have not kept pace with everybody else's in the health care system.

When we talk about a revolution in primary care, when we talk about interdisciplinary care—if you're a first people in this province, this care is delivered through aboriginal health access centres, but those centres' budgets have been cut back so far that it is very hard for them to live up to their mandate.

What does that mean? That means that if you are a first people living in Ontario, chances are your diabetes won't be properly managed. What happens to First Nations people when their diabetes is poorly managed? They go blind. They have amputations. Their kidneys fail. They go on dialysis. Their eyes fail. It's horrible. It shouldn't be happening, and there's no reason for it to happen. This has to change.

The toll of diabetes is also awfully high in the Hispanic and the black Ontarian populations. Those people usually receive services from the community health centres in their communities. I would like to praise the government for the announcement of an increase in the number of community health centres as well as the number of satellite community health centres in our communities.

The announcement has been made, but the rolling-out of those community health centres is extremely slow. They run into bureaucratic red tape, a nightmare of giant proportions, which means that, here again, people with diabetes, who need those interdisciplinary team practices in order to manage their diabetes and stay safe, don't have access because the government is so slow in coming through on its promise to increase the number of community health centres in our communities.

The last point I want to make—and I realize my time is running out—is that in order for people with diabetes to stay healthy, they need access to healthy food; they need access to safe communities and places to exercise so that they can maintain a healthy weight. In order to do this, their income has to be high enough to afford them the time, the money and the energy required to manage and prevent diabetes.

Poverty is directly linked to diabetes. If you haven't got the money to eat a proper diet, to buy a healthy food basket, you are at a much higher risk of developing diabetes.

Every day or so, every week, my colleague Mr. Prue rises in the House and asks the minister in charge of the poverty strategy, "When are we going to hear about this?"

When are you going to table the strategy?" Every one of those days that goes by is another day when hundreds of thousands of Ontarians are at risk of developing type 2 diabetes, because type 2 diabetes is directly linked to your diet.

The Minister of Health attended a Canadian Diabetes Association luncheon today, and said, "We expect the number of Ontarians living with diabetes to rise to 1.3 million Ontarians"—1.3 million people. This is a lot of people who will have a serious chronic disease. We could prevent a lot of those people from developing diabetes in the first place if we had a strong anti-poverty strategy that allowed those people to eat proper food, to manage the stress in their lives, to have time aside from the three jobs to go and exercise and stay fit, so they can maintain a healthy weight, but we have to continue to wait.

In closing, I want to say that An Act to proclaim the month of November Diabetes Awareness Month in Ontario is a good thing. The work of the member from Mississauga-Brampton South has to be commended. We need to raise awareness about diabetes in this province, because chances are, if it doesn't affect us directly, it will affect a member of our family or one of our neighbours, sometimes with dire consequences. So I certainly support this, and the New Democrats will be voting in favour of the work that the member from Mississauga-Brampton South has done.

I want to close in saying that I want, once again, to congratulate the Canadian Diabetes Association for the work they have done. It is through their constant advocacy that we have insulin pumps available to the people of Ontario. It is because of their hard work on the ground that we now have a chronic disease management strategy for diabetes that is rolling out in Ontario. They are leaders in protecting their members, they are leaders in keeping the people of Ontario healthy, and they deserve to be praised for the good work they have done.

The NDP will be supporting this bill. It is something good.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I'm very pleased to join in the debate today and give my wholehearted support to Bill 113, which has been brought forward by Mrs. Mangat, the MPP for Mississauga-Brampton South. Bill 113, as others have said, would establish An Act to proclaim the month of November Diabetes Awareness Month in Ontario.

I'm also very proud to be part of a government that is tackling the growing health care challenge that many Ontarians face. As some of you in this House will know, this government is investing \$741 million in new funding dollars to develop a comprehensive diabetes strategy over four years: to prevent, manage and treat diabetes.

Like the speaker before me said, the issues that those who struggle with diabetes face are significant. It is an illness that many of us have had impact our own families. In my own family, I think about my great-grandfather. My mother talks about her grandfather, who struggled

with his sight, lost his legs and ultimately died struggling with diabetes.

So investments in education, investments in helping those individuals who may be more susceptible to it and ultimately curbing the growth that we are seeing in this very tragic illness are critical.

Being able to prevent and help someone learn how to better eat, how to better manage their own health, is something that I think An Act to proclaim the month of November Diabetes Awareness Month will go a long way to doing.

Monsieur le Président, le diabète est une maladie chronique, comme vous le savez, et évolutive, dont les répercussions touchent un nombre croissant d'Ontariens et Ontariennes. On doit aider ceux qui auraient peut-être de la difficulté dans leur vie avec le diabète, ainsi que sensibiliser ceux dans la communauté à peut-être savoir comment mieux manger, comment on peut avoir une diète qui nous aiderait à prévenir quelque chose comme le diabète.

1410

That's really what makes me very proud about the government's strategy with respect to preventing diabetes, to see the strength of support that we've received from, amongst others, the Canadian Diabetes Association, which says: "This new strategy will provide an estimated 900,000 Ontarians with diabetes the tools they require to effectively manage their disease."

Similarly, Dr. Catherine Zhan, the chair of the diabetes expert panel, said, "The diabetes strategy takes the most up-to-date research and best practices from around the world and matches them with the needs of patients in Ontario."

So the work that we are doing at the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, the leadership by the Ministry of Health Promotion, go a long way to helping us make sure that, in the future, treatment will be better available for those with diabetes, but most importantly, that we will be able to prevent the onset of the illness amongst some Ontarians, help those who have it to better manage and raise awareness. That's what today's debate is about.

The role of the MPP from Mississauga-Brampton South seeking to raise awareness with respect to diabetes—I congratulate her for it and I give her my wholehearted support.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate? The honourable member from Trinity-Spadina. I think you just have a few seconds.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I just want to say that the government, by its own admission, is spending \$5 billion on treating diabetes, and we only spend 1%, \$8 million, on prevention. It's simply wrong.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. You actually had zero seconds left.

Further debate?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I'm pleased to speak in support of Bill 113, the private member's bill designating November as Diabetes Awareness Month in Ontario. I

want to thank and congratulate my colleague, Amrit Mangat, the member from Mississauga-Brampton South, for her efforts in bringing forward this bill to raise awareness of diabetes, a disease that affects more than 900,000 Ontarians today. This figure is expected to grow over the coming years.

The exact causes of diabetes are unknown. In most cases, family history and lifestyle play a part. Certain treatable risk factors, such as high blood pressure, obesity, smoking and alcohol consumption, also accelerate the progression and the severity of diabetes. Raising awareness of this disease, which is the cause of heart attacks, strokes, kidney failure, limb amputations and eyesight complications leading to blindness, is important. It is important because current research and the tools available to us make it simple for individuals to manage the risk of the complications associated with this chronic disease.

Also, prevention of the onset of diabetes needs to be communicated to those with a high risk of diabetes. Some of those affected people could have avoided or delayed the onset of these complications if they were aware of the modern-day research and made some simple dietary and lifestyle changes. I say this from personal experience. I have lost two members of my family, my mother and my sister, to diabetes. Had they known about the impact of their diet, the need for daily exercise early in their lives, and had the benefit of in-home blood glucose testing, they may have lived longer.

I was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes at the young age of 36, and it's only at this point in my life that I really became aware of my dietary problems—a common problem in the South Asian community. My wife and my children learned that certain lifestyle changes had to be made. A healthy, balanced diet, coupled with regular exercise as well as taking oral medication properly, would maintain proper glucose levels in my blood and help me reduce the risk of complications to live a normal, healthy life. I have managed for 19 years, well above average, on oral medication and only recently resorted to insulin injections.

More than 50% of Ontarians with type 2 diabetes are not at the recommended blood glucose targets and are at high risk of developing complications. It is essential that we, as a government, increase awareness of diabetes, the risk factors and the related complications through public education.

We also need to encourage those who are already diagnosed with diabetes and their families to better manage their condition and improve their quality of life by making those dietary and lifestyle changes early, because it's absolutely necessary.

The Diabetes Awareness Month Act, 2008, if passed, is just another means to help raise awareness by officially declaring November as Diabetes Awareness Month in Ontario, and it adds to the good work already being done by the Canadian Diabetes Association.

The Canadian Diabetes Association, one of the key stakeholders in this area, has been public with their

appreciation for the actions taken by the Ontario government on diabetes treatment and prevention.

Diabetes is a complex, serious chronic disease that impacts both the individuals affected and the larger population. Diabetes is the sixth leading cause of death in Ontario and Canada. We, as a government, should be doing everything we can to make Ontarians healthier. This bill just adds to all other programs, and therefore, I will be supporting this bill.

Have we done enough? We've done a lot. Can we do more? Yes, we can. I think this bill is just another piece of the work that we need to be doing, and I thank my colleague for bringing this bill forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: It certainly gives me great pleasure to rise in support of Bill 113, introduced by my good friend and colleague the member for Mississauga—Brampton South. It really is a pleasure because, for once in this House, instead of the somewhat fractious debate that we so often are engaged in, we seem to be developing a consensus from all sides that this is a very important step forward. I think a lot of the credit must go to the Canadian Diabetes Association and the good work they've done with all of us to bring their issues forward.

As a public health professional myself, I think that this is a disease that really poses a major burden on society, not only because of the physical impact on individuals but, in fact, the social and emotional burden that this disease can bring. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure—raising awareness so that people, when they go and see their physician, can pose the question: "Are you going to check my blood glucose? I need to know. The incidence of diabetes is rising in our society. What can I do to prevent myself from becoming one of those many people suffering from this disease?"

It is a fact that many people have no symptoms whatsoever. In the early stages of the disease, some 35% to 44% of people with diabetes don't know they have it. This type of bill is going to increase the general population's knowledge and index of suspicion, and I would like again to congratulate the member for bringing this forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The member for Mississauga—Brampton South, Mrs. Mangat, you have up to two minutes for your response.

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I would like to thank all the members from all three parties for their thoughtful comments about Bill 113, the Diabetes Awareness Month Act, but I would like to give special thanks to the members from Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Scarborough—Rouge River, Oak Ridges—Markham, Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, and Nickel Belt.

I would also like to thank the Canadian Diabetes Association—the members are sitting in the public gallery and in the west gallery—for the support they have provided for this bill.

1420

This bill is all about education and, in the fight against diabetes, education is the key. If this bill is passed and

the month of November is designated as Diabetes Awareness Month, this bill will help to educate Ontarians how to manage, treat and prevent the disease. This is all this bill is about; this is all about education. By making November Diabetes Awareness Month, we can create a platform for our future educational campaigns.

Diabetes is becoming increasingly prevalent in the province of Ontario. It is vital for those who are suffering from this disease to get more involved for their own self-management. This bill will help to educate those who are not impacted or suffering from the disease. This bill will enable them to understand the challenges that diabetics face on a daily basis.

I have no doubt that the day will come when we find a cure for this disease. The day will definitely come, but until that day we must continue to raise awareness so that we can improve the quality of life for those living with the disease and we can prevent the onset of disease.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): For those that are watching, at home and those in the galleries, we'll vote on this ballot item in about 105 minutes.

SINGLE-USE BOTTLED WATER

BAN ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 INTERDISANT

LES BOUTEILLES D'EAU JETABLES

Mr. Kular moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 112, An Act to prohibit the sale of single-use plastic bottles of water in Ontario / Projet de loi 112, Loi interdisant la vente de bouteilles d'eau en plastique jetables en Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order 98, Mr. Kular, you have up to 12 minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Kuldip Kular: It's an honour to present this piece of private members' legislation, Bill 112, for consideration before my colleagues.

Our society is becoming increasingly aware of the impact of human activities on the natural environment. Ontario is a beautiful province and Ontario is a bountiful province filled with beauty and opportunity. Opportunity for commerce and industry comes from the natural bounty, but only if it's managed responsibly. If we want to keep our province beautiful and a healthy place to live, we must be responsible stewards. Of course, as a government, we also desire that Ontario prosper, and we need business and industry to help us. We look to business and industry partners to assist us in making Ontario the best place to live in terms of economic opportunity and healthy living.

Bill 112 is An Act to prohibit the sale of single-use plastic bottles of water in Ontario. This bill speaks to what I and some of my colleagues believe to be unsound business practices. The sale of single-use plastic bottles of water offers a convenience to consumers, but one with a significant impact on our environment. The sale of water using this form of bottle undermines some of the

basic services offered in our communities, that is, the provision of clean, affordable, fresh water from the taps in our homes and workplaces.

Bill 112 does not set out, in any way, to abolish the bottled water industry. I am fully aware of many instances when industry and businesses have assisted our communities in this province in times of need, through philanthropy and donations in money and products. I'm also very thankful that the bottled water industry has chosen to establish itself in my riding of Bramalea-Gore-Malton. Their presence as an employer is valued by my constituents, many of whom work at various plants to produce bottled products.

As a father and a consumer myself, I'm also aware of the values and importance of preserving consumer choice. In fact, as elected officials, the members of this Legislature know something about consumer choice. Bill 112 does not stop the sale of water bottles, except in a specific form: non-reusable, single-use plastic bottles.

The reason for seizing upon this particular product is twofold. First, it is because of the great amount of energy that is consumed in the production, transportation and recycling process. As you know, the availability of energy in our province is a great challenge. Our Premier has often spoken of the need in our society for a culture of conservation. The first rule in conservation is to reduce the waste, then to reuse the waste, and then to recycle. Most Ontarians know about recycling and make use of the programs offered in our communities, in our municipalities, in partnership with industry, including the bottled water industry. Recycling as the industry's sole resource does not solve our energy problem or do enough to make Ontario conservationist. Recycling may be considered a second-last resort to sending our plastic waste to landfills and incinerators. Industry would be helping our society in a more meaningful way if it concentrated on a creative solution to this problem. From reusable containers that can be filled at taps, to selling water in larger vessels from which reusable containers could be filled, there are so many options.

The second reason I feel this form of bottle should be banned in this province is due to the effect this product has had on our public health and also on our public confidence in our municipal water systems. Ontario is blessed with abundant natural water resources, most of which are quite clean. Our municipalities are also highly regulated and provide for their residents, in the vast majority of cases, the cleanest drinking water in all this province.

Consumers may, on one hand, not realize this because government is not in the business of advertising, as business does. Every year, bottled water industries are able to spend millions of dollars on advertising. The result is that the sale of bottled water in North America produces profits that vastly outstrip the sale of soft drinks, the other products of many of these big companies.

The bottled water industry has not intentionally eroded public confidence. This has happened because of a lack of dialogue in our society on this problem. That's why I

feel that Bill 112 should contribute to that debate. The debate is under way throughout North America, in cities such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, Phoenix, Chicago and St. Louis. It has been under way in Canada in Vancouver, Toronto, Ottawa, Niagara Falls, St. Catharines, Kitchener-Waterloo, Cambridge, Sault Ste. Marie and Sudbury.

Recently, London, Ontario, banned the sale of bottled water at its facilities. Bottled water is banned in all city facilities in London with an alternative to bottled water, such as drinking fountains and taps. It was reported in newspapers that school boards throughout Canada were also considering bans, including in the Vancouver, Toronto and Ottawa-Carleton areas. Bottled water will be banned in Waterloo region schools as of 2009. Many university student groups are also creating bottle-free zones to address this issue.

1430

The opposition to this bill from some consumers and the bottled water industry must be acknowledged. They have been doing a fantastic job so far. In many ways, I think this legislation makes sense. Our province must continue to support recycling initiatives. We cannot rely only on recycling. I think there is an opportunity for business and industry to become more conservationist if we pass this bill. Marketing green solutions to problems that arise from consumerism is something that the bottled water industry should explore. The production and sale of reasonable drinking containers, even plastic or biodegradable plastic containers, is a possible source of revenue.

Bill 112 will not affect consumer choice, as tap water is the best consumer secret in this province. It's estimated that the cost of tap water in the city of London is just 13 cents per litre. The average cost of bottled water is estimated to be \$1.20 per half-litre. It's more than gasoline.

The other secret to consumers is that much bottled water is actually reprocessed tap water which their tax dollars pay for. The industry also suggests that consumers must choose their product because the taste and quality of bottled water is superior. If the bottled water industry spent no money on advertising their product and consumers were left to make up their own minds, they would choose the tap water provided by municipalities, which is already extensively used.

It's estimated that producing bottled water creates 150 times more greenhouse gases than does tap water. Torontonians alone consume 100 million plastic bottles a year, 65% of which end up recycled and the remaining 35% in landfills. That means an estimated 35 million bottles end up in a landfill or in an incinerator. The risk of drinking contaminated water from the fountains is minimal. The International Council of Bottled Water Associations estimates that in 2000, 820 million litres of bottled water were produced for Canadian consumption. By 2003, this figure rose to 1.5 billion litres.

These are some of the issues I wanted to put before my colleague legislators. I would expect that they will give it due consideration and support my bill banning single-use plastic bottles in this great province of ours.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett: Bill 112, titled An Act to prohibit the sale of single-use plastic bottles of water in Ontario, I consider the latest in a long list of McGuinty nanny state style bans designed to divert our attention from this government's lack of attention to what's essentially driven this province from first to worst, from have to have-not, from a province formerly of job creators to now job killers. This bill would put even more strain on the businesses that are attempting to remain in Ontario and maintain jobs in Ontario while this provincial economy continues to spiral downward.

At the same time that small businesses and large businesses are struggling, we see a government that once again makes doing business in Ontario more difficult. I think of the bull-headed attempt to ram through that WSIB legislation, once again hampering those very employers who have long aided in ensuring the strength of our economy.

In opposition, we believe there are often better ways to care for the environment without putting more people out of work and putting more people out of business. I look forward to hearing the position of the environment minister, John Gerretsen, with respect to a water bottle ban in Ontario.

As I mentioned, there are alternatives. I think of the possibilities through a return system; it has worked well in ensuring the diversion of waste in other sectors. Bottom line: I feel that if this government were truly concerned about plastic bottles, their time would be perhaps better spent consulting with stakeholders. We see a government that ignores consulting with those particular companies that this legislation would impact directly. We do ask the other side: Try thinking of incentives. Consider education and information programs, something beyond a simple ban.

On another note, there is a long history of human beings carrying water around with them. For example, I think of skins and hollowed-out gourds. In the summer-time, I always make sure I've got a one-gallon jug of water in the backseat of my car, in the backseat of my truck, and oftentimes on my tractor. I use this for hydration; I use this to wash my face, to wash my hands. I think it's very, very important.

This past summer, my wife and I spent some time in the Mojave Desert, and in other deserts in western Canada. We would set out at 4 o'clock in the morning—a much more reasonable temperature—but we felt it was imperative to have two one-gallon jugs of water in the back of our car. That's something that I have learned over the years in desert travel.

I think of the canteen, this concept of a portable means of carrying water. It's a time-honoured tradition dating, obviously, far past military use of the metal canteen. I think of the frontier cowboy, who would use a leather or metal container, and back to, as mentioned earlier, the early use of a hollowed-out gourd to carry water. It's very difficult for this Legislature to change some of that thousands of years of human behaviour.

We fast-forward to today and the modern canteen, exclusively made now out of plastic, polyethylene or PET, the kinds of bottles we're discussing today, or polycarbonate, obviously much lighter than their metal equivalent—very resistant to developing leaks, for example, if they're dropped. It brings us once again full circle, back to the plastic water bottle that this government, through its heavy hand, is looking to remove from thirsty consumers.

I make note again that if you are out hunting, for example, at this time of year when it's very warm, you don't carry a couple of cans of pop with you. It gets warm. You don't want to drink warm pop, for example. Warm water is something much more palatable; hence, the plastic water bottle or any version of the canteen.

We've all received feedback and e-mails from the Pepsi Bottling Group, and I quote: "We are shocked and outraged that anyone would introduce a bill that places an entire sector and over 11,000 Ontario jobs at risk. We are surprised that the Legislature would consider making such a sweeping and arbitrary intervention in the marketplace, with the resulting and significant impact on jobs and investment."

1440

Food and Consumer Products of Canada wrote me a letter, saying: "Access to bottled water in public buildings, institutions and recreational facilities is equally important to ensuring people stay hydrated. Many communities recommend that people keep bottled water on hand in case of an emergency. PET water bottles"—the bottles we're talking about here today, which are not made from bisphenol A, I might add—"are 100% recyclable and are recycled in Ontario single-family homes at average rates around 70%." The numbers are "closer to 90% in some large urban" areas.

Further, "recycled PET containers are turned into a variety of other consumer products," such as carpeting and fleece-type clothing.

Food and Consumer Products communicated with me: "The industry has contributed millions of dollars to supporting the blue box recycling program in Ontario municipalities and it continues to invest in innovations that result in new packaging that uses fewer materials."

Here's a note from a group called Refreshments Canada: "When considering the energy used in the production of packaging, PET plastic bottles offer a number of benefits. PET is very light and strong, and requires only a small amount of packaging material to be used.... Recycled PET plastics retain a very high portion of the energy used to create the material in the first place. By continuing to recycle at a high rate, consumers are not only reducing the amount of materials that go to landfill, they are minimizing much of the energy used to produce new packaging."

So, all that said, I continue to question the need for a government member to continue to chip away at removing consumer choice, and to further hamper Ontario businesses and bring in other, kind of heavy-handed McGuinty-style bans.

Instead, if they're concerned about plastic bottles, consult with the people who manufacture them and consult with the people who are being impacted. Let's look at improving some of this through incentives, education and information.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos: My colleague from Trinity-Spadina, Rosario Marchese, will be speaking to this bill as well, in short order.

It's a most interesting proposition, and I think the member for Bramalea-Gore-Malton, Kuldip Kular, is to be congratulated for bringing it to this chamber. I like him—the member, that is. I find him a very conscientious and diligent member of this chamber, and I find him to be a responsible and constructive member of this assembly. He serves the assembly well; he serves his constituents well.

This is an interesting proposition because it has—

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Well, it addresses multiple concerns or interests. Firstly, this proposition, this weird proposition, that we find ourselves in, in 2008, of paying money for drinking water, something that you too as a kid—because you're not that much older than I am, Speaker—would recall as well. You'd recall a day when it would be absurd to talk about buying bottled water to drink at the dinner table or during the course of the day.

The marketing of it has been phenomenal. The corporate interests have a huge stake in ensuring that people drink bottled water when in fact the biggest chunk of it is tap water that's put through any number of processes—osmosis and so on.

I remember—I think the Toronto Sun did a bit of an exposé on how members at Queen's Park were being coddled with mineral water in those coolers out in the hallway. They published a story with a picture of those water coolers. Little did they know that hard-working Legislative Assembly staff cart those empty containers down to the basement and they're filled with a green rubber hose out of a tap in the basement—it's true. Toronto happens to have very good water; I think it does. Toronto has very tasty water.

I don't go to high-end restaurants, but I'm told by people that you go to one of those places—I don't know, Truffles. Did I get the name right, Ms. Best? Truffles? Or Prego, or places like that. The first thing they do is put a bottle of water on your table and want you to pay \$6, \$7, \$8 for the bottle of water. I have sympathy for the restaurateur, because it is a tough business, but it's a huge mark-up item. I was pleased to read in the New York Times—I think it was around six months ago—that the trend in New York, of course the trendsetter, is for people to ask for tap water. You see that starting to spread here in Toronto. Waiters and waitresses—service people—like it because what that means is that the customer is probably going to spend the money on a dessert, or on a couple of extra drinks before dinner, and so their tip, if anything, is not only the same, but it's increased.

I'm told by friends of mine—not close friends but people I know who go to high-end restaurants—that that's starting to become a trend here. Yet at the end of the day, I've got to tell you, that once a week as I leave Welland on Sunday afternoon, I stop by the Celi & Presti Supermarket down at the end of Crowland Avenue. That's the Ramundo family. They've been in Canada for a good number of years now. It's great. The Ramundo family is just great. It's probably one of the best Italian delis in Ontario, if not the best. So I stop by there and I pick up a case, a carton, eight bottles of sparkling San Benedetto, because the member doesn't speak—for San Benedetto at Celi & Presti you're paying around eight bucks for eight bottles. You go down to Celi & Presti in Welland, Crowland Avenue, and you're going to get the bargain of your life when it comes to San Benedetto sparkling water.

Having said that, I acknowledge that my friends tell me if you go to Pusateri's in Toronto, which is a high-end store, that you can get the San Benedetto in glass bottles. Now, it's not the same price that you pay for it down at Celi & Presti on Crowland Avenue in Welland, the best Italian deli, bar none, in the province. But it is the same content.

What I'm saying is that this bill should go to committee. I heard the previous speaker and the objections, but the bill should go to committee. If the bill is about banning plastic bottles, and there is a case to be made for that, well, fine, then let's ban plastic bottles—if there's a case to be made for that—across the board. I think we've got mixed messages here, because on one part it's designed to encourage people to drink tap water; easily enough said if you live in Toronto or Welland. If you live down in Wainfleet, along the lake shore, where the public health department, because of a dispute about a sewer line that's going to cost those 400 or 500 homeowners \$30 million to \$60 million, which they cannot afford, those folks would far sooner spend money on bottled water than on paying for that sewer infrastructure, because they're not getting any support from the province and the feds.

You go up to northern Ontario and bottled water is very important to some of those communities. You go to communities that are hit from time to time with boil-water orders, and a bottle of water is very important. So I hope that the focus of the concern is on the plastic bottle, and that the issue of commercialized water is secondary. That's a whole different argument about the Great Lakes and access to water and so on.

I've got concerns about this. I think it is an interesting argument and debate. I look forward to this going to committee and having all sorts of data, and I'm sure the member, Kuldip Kular, will provide us with that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Vic Dhillon: I rise before this House to support the principles of Bill 112. This is an ambitious bill introduced by my colleague from Brampton-Gore-Malton. I am pleased that this bill has started an important environmental dialogue in our province.

We as a province cannot take the environment for granted. As leaders, we should be encouraging citizens and businesses to recycle. Recycling should be as automatic as putting on a seat belt when we get into our cars. It should come as second nature. I will admit that I'm not the best when it comes to recycling. I do try my best and I believe that everyone else also tries their best. I believe that it's imperative that businesses take the initiative and recycle.

Relying solely on recycling single-use water bottles does not fix the problem of pollution caused by water bottles. The energy required to recycle and remake materials from plastics is not without pollution as it consumes more energy that is largely produced from fossil fuels. It is estimated that producing bottled water creates 150 times more greenhouse gas than tap water. This is a huge figure. Not only must we reduce the waste produced in our society, but we must reduce the need for recycling, as the processing of materials itself requires significant amounts of energy.

1450

The bottled water industry thus far claims that recycling is a sufficient activity to deal with waste produced by single-use plastic water bottles. However, there are alternatives that the industry should be encouraged to foster and develop. We need to engage in this dialogue. We need to continue to look at the alternative ways of delivering products so that they are environmentally friendlier. There are biodegradable plastics out there that would not be a complete solution to the single-use plastic water bottle; however, it would have a significant impact from a public health and environmental point of view.

Once again, I would like to thank the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton, who has brought forward this very thought-provoking bill, and I encourage continued debate both in this House and in homes and businesses across our province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Bill Murdoch: Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak on Bill 112. Right off the bat, I had a concern with this bill. It's another bill banning something in this province, and this government has done a lot of that in the past.

I'm wondering if, over there, you will be appointing a new minister on banning. You're going to have a lot of trouble enforcing all these new banning rules that you have, so I would think you would need a new minister to look after that. I'll be looking forward to hearing that from the Premier when that happens.

But also this bill will have a very negative impact on my riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, because we're the home to Ice River Springs, which is in Feversham and employs over 250 people. I just want to put some of the facts on record on what this bill would be liable to do.

The Canadian bottled water industry provides over 11,000 direct and indirect jobs for Ontario citizens alone. In this time, we don't need to be losing jobs. These jobs are not only in the manufacturing industry, but also trans-

portation, distribution, special trades and administration. Single-use bottled water supplies are important in emergencies like the 2003 blackout or an evacuation like the Sunrise Propane explosion. How would you get water into an area? If you had a problem and you needed to get water in there, and a tanker couldn't drive in, then you could send bottled water in—these little plastic bottles of water that we have—but if you take them away, that won't be able to happen.

There are thousands of plastic packaged products that are not being recycled properly, no doubt. Would this bill or the following bill be in place for such items as soda pop bottles, plastic shampoo bottles and coffee cups?

Bill 112 will shut down water-bottling plants, there is no doubt that's what's going to happen, or lay off many employees in this industry. We don't need this in this time when we're losing jobs all over in our industry sector.

Ontario has recently introduced an aggressive, new Be a Hero recycling campaign. In the past, similar recycling programs had funding from the Canadian bottled water industry; they've helped do this. Now you're trying to take a swipe at them.

Water bottles are made out of PET plastic, which is meant to be recycled. What's wrong with recycling? It can be used to make new water bottles or clothing—they do it with clothing and also lawn furniture.

Brand owners pay 50% of the cost of recycling in the Ontario drinking water stewardship program. I want to put that on the record. The PET plastic gathered, which includes water bottles, is sold to an active and lucrative resale market—now that market won't be around if we pass this bill—that provides additional funds for municipal recycling programs. There is a high level of demand for this recycled PET, as it's called, and the water bottle is the most valuable in this stream.

Ice River Springs, as I said, is a big employer in our riding. We would hate to see something happen there. They produce these bottles.

I wonder if the member who brought this bill in thought of putting a cost on the bottle, like 10 cents. I don't know why we haven't done that with cans. We do it with beer bottles. We do it with wine bottles and liquor bottles now. Why can't there be a cost put on these bottles? Then, if you're worried about them being all across the country or on highways and that, there would definitely be people picking them up and putting them back into a recycling program, which is what a lot of industries are built on.

I would hope that the member who brought this bill forward would maybe have thought about something like that. Rather than putting people out of business, we could create a better business. If you put a few cents—it doesn't matter what it would be; 10 cents on a bottle—then they would be picked up by people and we wouldn't have this problem with littering. I can't understand why we haven't done that a long time ago, but it hasn't been done. I think that would be a better idea than just banning it.

I have concerns that this government likes to just ban things. We have another bill banning cellphones, and we've banned pit bulls; whatever else they come to, they like to ban it. I will be looking for the announcement of the new minister banning when that takes place.

With those few points in the time I have, I would like to say that I can't support this bill the way it's presented.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Small business and business in general in this province is under siege from this government. The first thing they did when they got elected some five years ago was increase their taxes. In some cases they increased taxes on small businesses by 34%. Currently, there's a bill going through the House—the WSIB workers' insurance bill—that will increase taxes in certain areas by \$11,000 for small businesses. Those are enough dollars to send a company out of business. The private businesses in this province have been suffering through this for five years now, and they are coming to the conclusion that they have no friends in the Liberal government.

You wonder about the research this bill went through. There were no public hearings about it and no public input to it; it was just another bill that comes along and perhaps grabs a headline or something. This government's whole method of operating is to simply grab a headline, almost regardless of the consequences.

There was some experience in the province. The city of London banned water bottles in their provincially run facilities. Over this past summer, there have been any number of exemptions. For instance, on golf courses, water bottles are needed on the carts, because they don't have facilities there for water, and the city of London has granted exemptions for that. As far as arenas and baseball diamonds are concerned, some of them have exemptions. It's obvious that these kinds of things don't work when you remove or ban this type of product.

I don't know why we would ban water, which by and large is good for you. I don't think anyone would argue that water isn't a very healthy thing for you to drink, and yet soda pop, which has very questionable health standards, hasn't been banned at all.

It's interesting that this bill comes along and bans things. It's also a philosophical difference that the Liberals have. They want to tell you how to live your life. They want to ban things they don't think are good for you. They don't want you making any decisions about your own life. If there's one thing that is philosophically different between a Conservative and a Liberal, I think that's it. To talk about some of the bans they've had, the ban on cosmetic pesticides is an interesting one. They banned cosmetic pesticides, but they didn't ban Roundup. I can tell you that the regulators who are writing the regulations around that bill are having a—

Mr. Bob Delaney: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Pursuant to standing order 23b(i), the member for Halton is addressing a different bill, long since past, and not the matter on the floor.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I understand your point. I would ask that—

Interjections.

1500

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. I would ask that 15 seconds be added to the clock for the honourable member.

The member from Mississauga-Streetsville makes this point quite often. The Chair does listen very carefully to the speeches in this Legislature. While I appreciate your point of order, it's made far too often and is becoming a distraction.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Forty seconds should be added now, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Forty seconds added.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: There have been over 27 bans this government has implemented in Ontario; most of them grab headlines, not doing anything to help the people of Ontario. It's an attack on the private businesses of Ontario. Banning the ban on clothes lines—that was a great one, when you ban the ban; banning pit bulls; banning plastic bags. And banning school contracts: This government has no hesitation in placing itself in the private sector business, so when there's a contract between a school board or any other organization and a private company, this government places itself between that contract and bans those things from happening.

There's a ban on used oil heating. You can't filter it or clean it up; you just ban it. And the sale of incandescent light bulbs—forcing us to use mercury-infested fluorescent bulbs.

It just goes on and on. It's sad that Ontario has come to this level.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. I just remind honourable members that during private members' public business, the Chair does give some leeway to the comments because it is private members' time.

Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm quite happy to support the bill that has been brought forth by the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton.

I'm impressed with the initiative because I'm convinced most Liberals today probably will not support you, and for that reason alone it's bold. I suspect that if they do support your bill, it will die, because it is bold as an initiative. But I, quite frankly, believe that the idea is a good one, because it seems to me the purpose is to encourage public confidence in the water that is treated by the city and supplied by municipal water systems. The objective appears to be to reduce the waste and consumption of energy associated with the production and recycling of plastic bottles by proposing a province-wide ban on the sale of single-use plastic bottles of water. In my view, that is a good thing.

We have, today, close to one fifth of the population in Canada that drinks only bottled water. That's an astounding figure, in my mind. One fifth of the people drink only

bottled water, mostly from plastic. Probably some drink out of a bottle, but most of it is plastic. We have a mass withdrawal of water which undermines the limited water supplies, diverts resources from municipal water systems, emits massive amounts of greenhouse gases, and produces vast amounts of waste, which we citizens have to pay for.

We know that municipal water systems are among the safest and strongest in the world. We know that. I believe it. Meanwhile, bottled water costs more, is less regulated, consumes more energy and releases more harmful toxins into the environment than tap water does. We know that, and we know that the industries, such as Nestlé, Pepsi-Cola, Coca-Cola and Danone have created an estimated \$50-billion-a-year business by convincing us that bottled water is better tasting and purer than tap water, none of which we believe is true. It's less regulated than the water that comes out of the tap, yet people somehow believe that this magic water that comes in these plastic bottles is safe, clean and regulated. While they may be tested from time to time, which could be once a year or longer, some Conservative members don't seem to mind that kind of thing. All they talk about is whether it's business: "If it's business, it's okay," and that worries me as an argument. It does.

But citizens and governments—at least some governments—are fighting back against this environmentally dangerous privatization of public water. I really did believe a while ago, a couple of years ago, that the Liberals, who five years ago said that they would stop the reckless giveaway of Ontario's precious water and start charging water companies for the water they take, actually were going to do something about it. This is what they've done: The big fee that they're charging these water companies is one penny for 3,000 litres of water. Man, that has them shivering in their boots. One penny for 3,000 litres of water—that's scaring business away, I'm convinced. That's how tough you Liberals have been on these private companies that extract a precious resource from our aquifers.

One of these days in the not-so-distant future, we're going to be fighting over water. We're seeing a water shortage all over the world, and rather than thinking about how we protect our water, we're talking about, "Oh, we've got to protect jobs or we've got to protect these poor companies earning billions of dollars for water as they charge tremendous amounts of money to buy a little plastic bottle of water." We charge them one penny to extract 3,000 litres of water and they charge 600,000 times the rate at the corner store, or any corner store for that matter. And we think that's okay.

Yes, it's true, as the member for Welland says, we're not talking, and this bill doesn't speak, to the commercialization of water. I am, and that's part of this debate. It is part of the debate. That's why I support it going to second reading, because I think we can have that good debate if it goes through second reading. I want to tell you that only 18% of the water bottles are actually recycled—18%. Where do the rest go? In landfill sites. Do

we force these corporations to deal with that particular waste? Do they pay for that recycling in any way? Do we force them to make sure that, at the source, the corporations find a way to make sure those bottles are recycled? Not one penny, not one cent.

These are the issues we've got to deal with, and I'm going to support this bill. It's good for second reading debate and I hope we get to it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I don't believe the Liberals have any more time left. I'll just check with the table. Nine minutes? I thought you said none.

I'm sorry—the honourable member from Etobicoke North.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: With your permission and indulgence, Speaker, I'd like to offer some arguments which I think could be termed a little more on the biological or the health side. First of all, to enter into the record the names of two or three chemicals which I think we, as a Legislature, will become more and more familiar with: One is PET, or polyethylene terephthalate, one is PTA, terephthalic acid, and one is MEG, monoethylene glycol.

Before I get into the biology in a moment, I would simply like to mention that this issue, for example, of particular chemicals that are leaching out, leaking out slow and steady, in microscopic quantities from things like plastic bottles or plastic toys or many of the other synthetic oil petroleum derivative products that we surround ourselves with, are slowly but surely being recognized as having biological effects. I hope that it will not take all of us, as a society, the same amount of time that it took, for example, to recognize and implement the changes and policies with regard to smoking or alcohol or helmets or seat belts.

Having said that, I would like to offer to this Legislature for its consideration that these types of chemicals are, first of all, being recognized of course as affecting young bodies, meaning children, meaning infants. Why is it being picked up? Why are the signals being recognized in those biological systems? Well, because small chemical amounts are able to disrupt early forming young bodies because, first of all, matters of concentration. As well, only certain amounts of chemicals are required to exert those effects.

But if we as a nation, as a society, pursue these, whether it's plastic bottles or plastic toys or other gadgets, all sorts of things—slowly but steadily these are influencing our bodies as endocrine disrupters. The government of Canada has recognized this. For example, they have just recently moved to ban one of the chemicals that, by the way, does leach out of these exact plastic bottles known as bisphenol A. What does this chemical do? It is a stealth estrogen, a stealth, secret female hormone, extracorporeal—not extraterrestrial; that means off the planet, but extracorporeal, outside the body—hormone. These are having real biological effects, whether it's the increase of breast cancer, early puberty in young women, decreased fertility rates in men or quite a whole host of other conditions, which is extremely important.

1510

In America, the most recently acquired motto is, "Yes, we can," and as part of that, of course, the litigators are now launching a multi-billion dollar lawsuit against a number of the manufacturers of these products, specifically right now to do with kids—Gerber, Playtex, Evenflo, Avent and others. I hope it will not take us as a society too long to realize that these types of plastics, some of the chemicals that I mentioned, are having real and significant biological effects and we should not wait another generation, as we have done so far, unfortunately, with things like smoking, alcohol, seat belts, helmets and so on, to recognize this and to implement it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm pleased to add to the debate on Bill 112, which was introduced by my colleague the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton, Dr. Kuldip Kular. As you know, it's important, when we come to this place as a member, to have the right to introduce a private member's bill. Most of the time, we debate those bills freely on both sides of the House and with no partisan ideology behind it. We openly speak about those issues, freely, and it's important. The member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton today brought to this House a very important topic to debate—bottled water: the health aspects of it and also the pollution, recycling, diversion and many different aspects.

I want to tell you something: In my past life I was a distributor. I used to distribute bottled water, juice and many different other things. I used to distribute almost a trailer load a day, and also I used to package the bottled water. I know it is a very important argument, and today I had the chance to meet with the bottled water association, who came to Queen's Park when they heard about the bill. They tried to talk to all the members and tell them about their initiatives and their job to protect the environment and their contribution to diversion, and also to pay some taxes on the usage of water.

As I mentioned, it's an important debate. I know the member is a doctor, a physician. He knows the health aspect of many different things, and he spoke eloquently and presented his views. Also, I listened to the member from Etobicoke North, another doctor, who spoke about the health effects on this front. Also, the member from the NDP spoke eloquently, expressing his views and ideas about this issue.

It's important, as I mentioned, to bring this issue forward to this House to be debated. Hopefully, this issue goes to committee and we get more ideas and more visions and more information from both sides—the people who use the bottled water, the people who produce the bottled water, and also the people who think that it shouldn't be banned from being used in the marketplace.

As I mentioned to you, I used to distribute those products. But water is not the only substance in those plastic bottles. There's juice, there's pop, and many different elements being bottled these days to be shipped from place to place. I'm not sure if my colleague is in-

quiring, is requesting, to also ban all plastic bottles, including the juice we buy from the market from time to time, which is bottled in plastic bottles. Also, as he mentioned, in many different areas like the north and many contaminated areas where they cannot use tap water for some reason—their water is polluted. As we know, not a long time ago everybody experienced the tragedy in Walkerton, where we saw the water was full of *E. coli* and many people died. Many Ontarians had to ship water to Walkerton. Also, the tragedy in New Orleans: In New Orleans, many people from Ontario and from Canada volunteered and gathered many bottles to ship to New Orleans to support the people there.

It's a huge discussion, and it should be opened in this place. I want to commend the member for bringing this forward to give us the chance and the ability to discuss it.

I'm an expert in that field. As I mentioned to you, I used to sell that stuff by the container, by the trailer, on a daily basis. Now we hear, from time to time, doctors and journalists speaking about the effect of those bottles when we use them. I don't know; I'm not an expert in that field. I'm just here to participate in the debate and to express my views.

Before we pass this as a law, with rules and regulations, we should exhaust all efforts to know more information about it. I think it is worth going to committee to listen to the stakeholders, the users and the people who claim this is dangerous to people's health.

In the end, it's a good exercise. My colleague, Dr. Kuldip Kular, is an able person who represents his constituency very well. He is expressing his ideas and exercising his right today in this House. I wish him all the luck and success, and I'm looking forward to hearing more debate on this issue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Seeing none, the honourable member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton has up to two minutes for his response.

Mr. Kuldip Kular: I want to thank all the members who spoke on this bill: the members from Haldimand-Norfolk, Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, Welland, Trinity-Spadina, London-Fanshawe, Etobicoke North, and my own city colleague from Brampton West.

If passed, this bill will force industry to change a convenient business practice, but the decision to lay off employees and close a plant rather than refurbish the plant to produce multiple juice bottles or bottles that offer more than one serving of water is one for the industry to make.

The objective of this bill is not to punish industry or workers, nor to eliminate the water bottling industry, but to end an unnecessary and wasteful business practice that negatively impacts all Ontarians in the long run. Whether it's our environment, our public health or our energy, it costs us a lot more, and that's why I have put this bill before the legislators at Queen's Park so that they can support this bill. I think, in the end, that this province will definitely have a healthier environment and healthier people, and people will not have to spend so much

money, having municipal water systems that already supply healthier water from their own taps.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The time for this ballot item has expired. We'll vote on it in about 50 minutes' time.

TAXATION AMENDMENT ACT
(EQUIPMENT PURCHASED FOR
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LES IMPÔTS
(ACHAT D'APPAREILS POUR
LES PERSONNES HANDICAPÉES)

Mr. Murdoch moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 109, An Act to provide a tax credit for the purchase of equipment or devices for persons with disabilities / Projet de loi 109, Loi prévoyant un crédit d'impôt pour l'achat d'appareils ou de dispositifs pour les personnes handicapées.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order 98, Mr. Murdoch, you have up to 12 minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: As you know, our times come up for private members' bills; I actually thought of this one back when I was out campaigning for the election about a year ago. I went to one home in our area and met some parents and their daughter, who actually lived in this place, and they asked me what our policy was on people with disabilities.

1520

At that point, a little book that shows you what we're supposed to say mentioned that information was still coming. It was about halfway through the election, so I was a little concerned that we didn't have a lot of policy on that. I did know, though, that we did believe that people on disability do not get enough to have a proper life. There's no way that the little bit of money that they get from the province and the feds is good enough. People with disabilities didn't ask for the disabilities; these things happen sometimes, sometimes they're born that way, whatever. So I thought about this.

Then this couple mentioned to me that their daughter needed orthopaedic shoes, and they're really expensive. She definitely would have had a hard time walking. They bought these shoes for her, but being that she didn't live at home, there was no way—there didn't seem to be any agency or any group that could help. They were concerned that maybe we should have something like that. You know, at least we should allow them to claim on their income tax the money they spent to help someone out. It's just a simple thing. It's not a hard, big, long bill with a lot of explanations; it's just that if you know somebody who has a disability—either related or not related; it doesn't even have to be related—and you want to help them out and buy the device or something that will make their life better, at least there should be some

way of recognizing that. I thought, well, why couldn't you just claim at least up to \$4,000 on your income tax? It's very simple.

That's why I brought this bill forward today, so that this House can debate it for second reading, vote on it and hopefully pass it. I really can't see anybody who would be against something like this, because I know everybody who sits in this House wants to help people with disabilities if they can. This is just a small way of doing that.

The bill got some news coverage, and some information was sent out across Ontario, and we've had a lot of people who have sent letters and support for the bill. Michael David, director of the Ontario chapter of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association, says:

"I am writing to express my support of Bill 109, An Act to provide a tax credit for the purchase of equipment or devices," like we've said.

"This bill will provide every Ontarian with a disability with additional significant savings in their purchase of equipment or devices, and in some cases, give them the ability to actually purchase the device instead of forgoing it because of financial need. This bill will save money for families, seniors and individuals."

And it will. A lot of times people in Ontario just can't afford the devices they need, for whatever disability they have, to make their lives much better and to live as normal a life as they can. There are a lot of agencies that do help out, and we've got to appreciate them, but it's sometimes the paperwork or just getting through to an agency to ask them for help. They have many people asking them for help. Sometimes that's just onerous on a person or families, and it doesn't happen. In this case, at least they could claim it on their income tax.

As I say, we had many other agencies, such as the March of Dimes—and Janet Macmaster and Judy Williams are here from the March of Dimes. We appreciate your being here today listening to this debate. As I say, I hope that all parties in this House will support it.

William Adair, executive director of the Canadian Paraplegic Association, Ontario, is also writing to say in regard to Bill 109 that he thinks this is a good bill and would support it. He goes on to say, "specifically to ask that Ontario allow our citizens with disabilities to take advantage of this opportunity, to alleviate the barriers of undue hardship." That's what I mentioned. Sometimes the barriers are there, but people just can't get the help that they need. If somebody has a friend and they want to help them, as I say, this would enable that friend to claim up to \$4,000 on their income tax if they help somebody with a device that makes their life much better.

I have a letter from Penny. She's an adult who is deaf and blind, living in Ottawa: "Technology moves at such a rapid pace that keeping up with it is a challenge." So for her to buy other devices to help her out—it's important that she's able to do this. If somebody helps her or her family can help her, then again, they can use this as a way of helping them out and being able to claim it. She

goes on to say how this would really help her in her situation.

As I say, many other agencies have written to us. Michelle Gold, senior director of the Canadian Mental Health Association, is another one who has written to us. It doesn't give us time to read all the letter fully here, but: "This letter is in support of Bill 109.... The Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario division, is a provincial association that is committed to improving services and supports for individuals with mental illness and their families, and to the promotion of mental health in Ontario." They go on to say, "Bill 109 would increase an individual's access to assistive devices needed to carry out the usual activities of daily living, which in turn supports their mental health."

In the long run, by allowing this bill to pass, when we can help people out it helps us in many other areas. It helps people, as I say, to live a better life than they had before.

We also received many e-mails from people who work in the accessibility coordination field, helping people get equipment they need to function, like Jeanette in Kingston: "As both a person with a disability and someone who works towards improving accessibility for persons with disabilities, I know intimately the many struggles that folks like myself face in navigating an environment designed without due consideration of our needs."

"The ability to transcend some of these significant barriers often depends on access to equipment and technology. I know, for example, that my life has been nearly transformed since I got my cochlear implant in 2004. On a very basic level it afforded me considerable independence and success in almost every area of my life, but especially in my professional life and as a mother."

There are many other letters like this from people who have disabilities and think that this is a good idea and a good bill for this Parliament to pass.

Here's another one: "I support your private member's Bill 109. I myself am hearing impaired and have been waiting to be able to buy hearing aids, and passage of your bill would go a long way in helping me and likely hundreds of others in doing so. Good luck."

I also have signed support from staff and volunteers from the following organizations based out of London and surrounding area. I know the good members who live in London will be glad to hear that these people also support this bill: the community care access centre; Victorian Order of Nurses; Community Living London, Hutton House, London; autism dog trainers; Regional Support Associates; Thames Valley Children's Centre; and the Epilepsy Support Centre of London. I also mentioned that the March of Dimes are here to support this bill.

Hopefully, everyone else in the House can throw their support behind it and we can get on with this bill, moving forward, so that in the future, in the new year, people will be able to claim it on their income taxes. It's a simple little amount that would help people out in their way and

make their lives that much better. I appeal to everyone here today to support this bill so we can move it along through this House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Before I ask for further debate, I just want to explain the rotation this afternoon. Normally, in a regular Parliament that had room, the independent member would sit between the third party and the government. Because of the rump, we're unable to do that, so the Speaker, after the independent member speaks, looks to the government side to speak next in the rotation.

Is there anyone from the government side who would like to speak?

Mr. Bob Delaney: It is a pleasure to follow the address by my colleague from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. I do have to say from the very outset that I support the bill. The member is on to a good idea here. Frankly, I think he might be a little ahead of his former party. In fact, if his former party had listened to him and maybe worked with this issue instead of the one that they did bring to the last election, things might be a little bit different in the House today—but that's just water under the bridge.

1530

Let's talk about some of the people who from this proposed measure, whether it passes in this or another format—because this is private members' time and the member has proposed a private member's bill, and what we've seen here, even this fall, have been two examples of issues that were first brought up as private members' bills. The member for Durham brought up more than once his proposal for a cell phone ban, which is now a government bill, and he has been suitably recognized for his contribution. The member for Sault Ste. Marie brought up his idea on the apology, which is in fact now passed as the Apology Act. So whether it be this private member's bill or whether the measures proposed by the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound resurface in a different way, I thank him for bringing this measure to the House.

Some of the people who are likely to benefit most from the type of things that he's proposed are people very much like us who stand here today, members of the baby boom generation born between the years 1946 and 1966. We would now be between the ages of 42 on the young side and 62 on the elder side. It is often said that, especially among men, everything you truly value about your body in time thins out, wears out, spreads out or falls out.

As this enormous baby boom demographic moves from middle age into old age, we will all increasingly need assistive devices. The member, somewhat inaccurately, refers to the province of Ontario's support for assistive devices as a pittance. Just to ensure that we put this in its proper perspective, Ontario has what is called the assistive devices program. It covers some 8,000 separate pieces of equipment and supplies, and it pays—now get this—up to 75% of the price for most devices. So let's just repeat that just to make sure everybody

grasps it: Ontario's assistive devices program can pay you up to 75% of the price for most devices. Now you say, "So what kind of devices are we talking about here?" Prosthetic devices, wheelchairs, mobility aids, specialized seating systems, feeding supplies, monitors, test strips for insulin-dependent diabetics, insulin pumps, supplies for children, hearing aids, respiratory equipment, braces, garments, pumps, visual and communication aids, oxygen and oxygen delivery equipment such as concentrators, cylinder, liquid systems and related supplies—the list is a very extensive one. I won't read all 8,000 items on it.

So you would say, "So what does this represent on behalf of the government of Ontario?" It represents an investment of some \$67 million—an amount that has increased by nearly a third since 2003.

I'm going to leave time for some of my colleagues to discuss this measure. As I said before, I think most of us are very much in support of what the member is trying to do with his private member's bill. We're glad to see it brought to the floor. It's very much congruent with the direction the government is headed in, and I thank you for the time to stand up and discuss it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to rise on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus, and as the community and social services critic for our caucus, to talk on Bill 109. I would like to acknowledge the work and the background that the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound put into this bill. I think it has some great ideas, great suggestions, and I would like to talk about some of the specifics on it.

The bill, of course, amends the Taxation Act to provide a credit to individuals who purchase equipment or devices designed for persons with disabilities for use by the individual—and this part is important—or by a member of his or her family. I think the reality is that there are many family members who would be more than willing to participate in the purchase of assistive devices that aren't covered by the assistive devices program if they had the additional incentive of the tax credit. That's a good move forward on the part of the member.

There are, of course, many organizations in Ontario that would support such a move. I think, right off the top of my head, of the CNIB, the MS Society and Autism Ontario—the list goes on. The reality is that every day there are new programs and new devices that can make the lives of people across Ontario with a disability easier, and anything we, as legislators, can do to encourage that innovation and ultimately encourage the use is a good thing. So I'm pleased to support it.

You know, when we go back to our constituency offices we all talk. We often hear of family members and individuals who have gone through the assistive devices program, and we all know full well that many devices and many individuals are not fully covered for this program. So this is a good move by the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, and I applaud him for that.

I think of a mother I had come in. Her son went through the school system and was given a special computer that he was using in his classroom to assist him and to allow him to be included in the regular stream of the school. The sad part of the story was that the computer was not allowed to go home. So if the child had any homework, or if the child had any kind of initiative where he wanted to do some additional work at home, he didn't have the specialized computer to use.

The mother said she would look at purchasing it, if there were some kind of support. I think that Bill 109 is a perfect example of something that maybe would be the tipping point to allow her to purchase that computer to match what she had been able to get through the school system.

I guess we could get into a bit of a discussion about why the computer wasn't able to be transferred home to allow him to do homework, but we won't get into that at this point; we're talking about Bill 109.

I'd also like to talk about some of the other bills that Progressive Conservatives have brought forward to assist people with disabilities.

Tim Hudak, our finance critic from Niagara West-Glanbrook, raised Bill 28, the Homestead Act, as something that would assist persons with disabilities and allow them to keep their homes.

Bill 70, the Blind Persons' Rights Amendment Act, is from Gerry Martiniuk. His riding is Cambridge.

Bill 78, the Property Tax Deferral Act, from our member for Thornhill, Peter Shurman, was debated in the last session.

Of course, on December 11, I am bringing forward a private member's bill that I trust everyone will be debating and supporting: Bill 94, the Social Assistance Statute Law Amendment Act. It would allow Ontario residents to set up a registered disability savings plan and not have that additional money clawed back through ODSP. I look forward to debating that bill on December 11, and I trust that the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound will be back to support me on Bill 94.

In closing, I think it's a great idea. I would like to acknowledge the work he has put into it. I hope we get an opportunity to debate the bill further, because it has a lot of benefits that I can see in both my riding of Dufferin-Caledon and, of course, across Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm happy to speak to the bill presented by the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. I think it's a good bill. A tax credit for equipment or devices up to \$4,000 is a good thing, and it speaks to the inadequacy of income supports for people with disabilities in Ontario. That's what it speaks to. It's an admission that people with disabilities have ongoing problems as it relates to their ability to live well and adequately, and to be able to pay for things that they need. That's what this bill is all about.

1540

I appreciate the brief history that the member for Dufferin-Caledon provided about the good things that

Mike Harris did. It was a good reminder that Mike Harris left us a very interesting and important legacy. So I found it useful, just as a reminder.

A single Ontario disability support plan recipient has to live and survive on \$1,000 per month. That is money that puts them below the poverty line. While \$1,000 seems like a lot of money, it's not a lot. It's not a lot for anyone. While it is true that the federal government provides a disability tax credit, which provides relief for extra everyday expenses incurred by persons with disabilities who suffer severe and prolonged mental or physical impairment, while that is helpful, people with disabilities still find themselves in very difficult positions.

While it is true that we have an assistive devices program, as the member for Mississauga—Streetsville was talking about, and, yes, it helps residents with long-term physical disabilities to access personalized assistive devices appropriate to their needs, while that is true and while that is good, it is inadequate in terms of what it doesn't do for people with disabilities. While it is true that it provides up to 75% of the cost for equipment such as artificial limbs, as the member was talking about, orthopaedic braces, wheelchairs, breathing aids and other things—it only provides for up to 75% of the cost, which means they have to pay for the extra cost on their own. When we're talking about hearing aids, which the assistive devices program supports to pay for, it only provides for 50% of the cost. We know there are more and more people in our society who are having difficulties in hearing, me included. I'm not there yet in terms of needing the device but there are more and more people who need this device, my brother being one. It's very costly. The government pays \$500 for these devices; I know that my brother had to pay \$2,000 to get it, and some may be more. That means people on ODSP, the Ontario disability support plan, have to pay that extra cost for that device.

It isn't just people on ODSP, but it's just people who are low income, who have these problems and have to pay for these things on their own. They may not have a health plan of their own. And so—

Ms. Sylvia Jones: If you're on ODSP it's 100%—assistive devices.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: If you're on ODSP. The point is, if you're not on ODSP and you are low income and need that device, the assistive devices program pays for 50%—that's about it. So there are a lot of people who need the additional support and they're not getting it.

The point of this bill is, how do we help people who have a disability to get a little more support so that their needs are looked after? It speaks to obligations of governments; it speaks to our desire to help people who are in need. It speaks to a collective spirit, doesn't it, Bill, of helping each other? That's why Bill is independent. We want to have a collective, communal sense of what we owe to each other; isn't that it? It's part of that spirit that Bill embodies, and it may not be true of all Conservative members but it is true of Bill. That's why I

want to support him in this initiative, because it's about looking after those whose needs are different than ours, who are unable to pay for the things that they need to be able to live happily and adequately. It's for that reason that I, for one, as a New Democrat, will be supporting it. I know my colleague from Welland will be speaking to this as well, and he'll share his ideas in a few moments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: First of all, I congratulate the member from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound for bringing such an important bill before us in the House to be debated today. It's a very important subject, a subject that's important to be discussed and to be supported. I know the member, who called himself the leader of the independent party or the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, he told me the other day—I want to congratulate him.

We talked many different times about different issues. I know of his passion about supporting disabled people in Ontario, and I know his daughter is very active in London in supporting people with disabilities on many different fronts. We meet with her pretty often. She comes to our office, and we discuss many different issues. It seems like the whole house, from the father to the children, established some kind of passion for people with disabilities, which explains why he had been expelled and banned from the Conservative Party—because he has a conscience about disabilities.

He talked about support for people with disabilities. I think it's very important. I was listening to the member from the third party, Mr. Marchese, speaking about the need and obligation to support people with disabilities, because we as a government, as a community, as a society, are obligated to support the people who live among us, and for some reason have some kind of disability.

So our government, of course, invests a lot on this front. We support more than 8,000 pieces of equipment and assistive devices programs. I believe our investments are important, but we are still far from establishing our need and our goal, which is to support every person with a disability across the province with whatever they need, because, as I mentioned, we are obligated to do so.

My colleague the member from Mississauga—Streetsville spoke eloquently about the details and the elements and how many pieces of equipment we support—up to 75%—especially with the people on ODSP and also some people who need it badly.

I think it's an important initiative and it's worth it to discuss and to debate. I commend the member from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound for bringing this issue forward, and I hope this initiative will see the light and go to committee, and the committee will debate more, and we'll see how we can establish it and how we can make it a law and benefit all the people with disabilities across the province of Ontario.

I said it many different times. I had the chance, in my past life, to work with people with mental disabilities and intellectual and developmental disabilities, and also to

work with people with physical disabilities. I know how many challenges they face on a daily basis. I think some kind of support—tax relief—would be important to give them the ability to survive; especially if they are on a low income, they don't have much money to spare in order to buy certain equipment. And as we all know, that technical equipment is very expensive. Some of it is between \$1,000 to \$10,000 for one piece of equipment.

So I think the support is well-needed. I congratulate the member, and I'm looking forward to seeing it in the committee, and we'll discuss it more.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to add some comments on the legislation before us today, Bill 109, An Act to provide a tax credit for the purchase of equipment or devices for persons with disabilities. This is certainly an example of something that we can offer to those who require specific devices in order to live active lives and hopefully to stay in their own homes as long as possible.

I am also pleased to follow up on the comments from my colleague from Dufferin—Caledon, whose commitment and dedication to her role as critic of the Ministry of Community and Social Services has been nothing short of top-notch. I thank her for her input on this bill and the work that she does in criticizing—and there's a lot to criticize these days—the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

She brought forward Bill 94, with respect to social assistance amendments. I appreciate her work on that front, and I know that that's coming up soon in November, so it's advance warning to members on the opposite side that they might think they should be supporting Bill 94, registered disability savings plans, because that certainly helps those with disabilities.

1550

The other bills that were brought forward, which the Progressive Conservative Party has attempted to introduce in this Legislature, that would help persons with disabilities were mentioned: The Homestead Act, 2007, the Blind Persons' Rights Amendment Act, the Property Tax Deferral Act and the Social Assistance Statute Law Amendment Act. I say that especially for my colleague from London—Fanshawe, who seems to think that we do not have a good record of giving a hand to people who need a hand.

I also want to remind him that it was his government in 2004—Minister Sorbara's budget—when the Liberals cancelled the RST, or the provincial sales tax rebate, on motor vehicles purchased for a person with a permanent physical disability, which was a maximum of \$2,400 for vans and \$1,600 for cars. That was cancelled. I get lots of calls in my office on that. I just want to remind the members opposite that we can do more for people with disabilities; this is what this bill that we're discussing this afternoon is about.

I want to focus on another particular aspect that this bill would address. I've spoken on the proposed legis-

lation from the member from Beaches—East York, and even the member from Pickering—Scarborough East has brought forward a bill about visual fire alarms to help Ontarians who have hearing challenges. Certainly, that concerns and deals with people such as seniors and those who are deaf or hard-of-hearing in all of our communities. We know that sound alarms are inadequate for these people. What would be more effective is providing them with strobe alarms, visual alarms or similar devices in order to be alerted to the dangers that may occur in an emergency situation. This is where Bill 109 makes good sense, as these are certainly costly pieces of equipment, especially when you consider the fact that these devices need to be on each floor in numerous areas of a home. I've certainly had the opportunity to speak many times to Maggie Doherty-Gilbert, who represents the Canadian Hearing Society in the area that I represent of Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, but also in the Peterborough area and part of Durham, and she does a fantastic job in that.

She's been working closely with the Durham Deaf Accessibility Committee and she's met with many MPPs, besides myself. In May, she came to see me again and she brought an individual named Rusty, who is a senior and who is deaf. Rusty and Maggie both indicated the level of fear experienced by those who can't hear, with respect to their safety. They also fear the fact that they can't afford the fire alarms. When the fire department comes, they could get charged. Rusty was very scared that he was going to get charged by the fire department for not having a smoke alarm in his house.

Statistics show that as many as 40% of the seniors in our community are either deaf or hard-of-hearing. They can't hear fire alarms, sirens from emergency vehicles or even the door when the neighbours knock and say, "There's a safety concern. Please come out of your house." To most of those people, an audible fire alarm isn't sufficient to make them aware of the potential danger that they may be faced with. Strobe alarms are what's needed in these cases. As I said, we spoke several times in the Legislature about the need for strobe smoke alarms to be installed and the help that people do need with installing them. It's not just the alarm; they have to have them wired in properly and they have to be on different floors in different rooms. It can go up to over \$1,000 quite easily.

As legislators, we are certainly all given the responsibility of working to provide seniors and people with disabilities with the dignity and independence of staying in their homes. That is partially addressed, certainly, in this bill that has been brought forward this afternoon. I know that the member from Mississauga—Streetsville brought forward the fact that there are 8,000 separate pieces of equipment or supplies that are covered. I say, there's another assistive device that should be covered, and that's certainly been brought up. As I said, the Canadian Hearing Society have been strong advocates, and they've brought that to us several times. The private member's bill—this is the third time, I think, I'm dis-

cussing the assistive device program with respect to strobe lighting. We're trying to help the government. It would be a good thing for the government to do.

Interjection.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Well, sometimes private members' bills can be non-partisan. We've had a couple of bills here today that have been non-partisan.

I want to congratulate the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound on the fact that he's bringing this forward, this tax credit bill that could help people who need the assistance that's not being covered now. I think it's a really tangible bill. We can go to committee, we can discuss it, and I'm sure the Canadian Hearing Society would certainly be there.

Mr. Dave Levac: The first one was motherhood.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Well, the government says it's motherhood. It is a good idea. They've got the power and they can bring it to committee and they can pass it in legislation. So bring it on; we'll certainly support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos: Thank you kindly, Speaker. The member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, Bill Murdoch, has produced a bill that is obviously supportable by every member of this Legislature and represents good policy. It reveals a sensitivity to the difficulties faced by persons with disabilities here in the province of Ontario. I applaud Mr. Murdoch for this legislation and I appreciate the chance to speak to it here, along with my colleague from Trinity-Spadina, Rosario Marchese.

It's a good bill. We support it and it should go to committee—end of story. I could sit down right now, I suppose, except I've got a few more things to say.

The bill is going to pass; I'm convinced of that. Mr. Murdoch is going to stand up when the bill passes and ask for it to be referred to a committee, and I'm sure that this assembly is going to agree to that.

However, what happens then? What happens to private members' bills when they are referred to committee but find themselves—that is to say, the bills—constantly blocked by government business? If a bill sort of rises to the surface because of the completion of government business in that committee, the government will then refer bills that don't belong in that committee to that committee.

So my fear, Mr. Murdoch, is that notwithstanding that the Liberals are going to stand up in here and applaud this bill, and they're going to applaud you—where were they when you needed them?—I am fearful that the bill could be sent off into legislative orbit, that the bill could disappear in Stephen Hawking's black hole.

Interjection: You're such a cynic, Peter.

Mr. Peter Kormos: The member accuses me of being cynical. After 20 years of observing this, I say it's not being cynical; it's being accurate.

I despair about that. I find it a very problematic thing, especially from a government that just recently forced through amendments to the standing orders that included,

oh, such fluffy, warm and fuzzy things as co-sponsoring bills. Oh, co-sponsored bills, my foot. You can co-sponsor bills until the cows come home. If you stand up here and you talk about it being a good bill, then make sure it gets dealt with in committee, referred back to this House, and called to third reading.

You see, a private member's bill is really no longer the member's bill once it has been referred back to the House by a committee on second reading, because only the government can call it. The private member, Mr. Murdoch, has no power, no authority whatsoever, to use any time that he might have available to him to call the bill for third reading. Let me make another observation: In this government, things don't happen unless the Premier's office wants them to happen.

It's a good piece of legislation. It warrants consideration in committee.

And let me say this. One of the things that I would want to see addressed in committee is to ensure that the range of devices for which there will be tax credits is a wide range, because the types of devices that are used by folks—I mean, every day there are new observations, new developments, new technology.

One of the things that we encounter—at least I do, down where I come from—is the need for seniors to have retrofitting in their homes, everything from the handrails in the bathroom to perhaps different-height toilets to accommodate them; handles on the sink taps, because arthritic hands—you don't have to be real old to have a problem opening and closing those faucets that don't have adequate handles.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: How do you get to the second floor?

Mr. Peter Kormos: The various elevators and other devices that use stairways to ascend to the second floor; the installation of a bathroom on the first floor, a small lavatory and water closet on the first floor—

Mr. David Zimmer: A beer room in the basement.

1600

Mr. Peter Kormos: Some members want to treat this stuff frivolously; I treat it very seriously, because we deal with folks who suffer because of their inability to finance these sorts of things themselves.

We talk a big game about accessibility, but when we're put to the test by Mr. Murdoch, as he does with Bill 109, we fail those very folks we talk a big game about. You can't just talk about accessibility; you've got to make it happen. This bill, among other things, guarantees accessibility in the most sacred of places—in someone's own home. This bill can be used to ensure that people, as they age and become seniors and older and older, live in their own homes longer and longer. What a delightful thing to do, and quite frankly, what a pragmatic thing to do, because it saves the taxpayer a whole lot of money at the end of the day.

I applaud Mr. Murdoch, the unbeatable Mr. Murdoch. There's a story going around that Mr. Murdoch offered to give up his seat for John Tory to run. The only condition

was that Bill Murdoch was going to run, as well, as an independent. John Tory didn't take him up on the offer, because I have no doubt that Bill Murdoch would beat John Tory up in Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound in a New York minute, standing on his head with one arm tied behind his back.

If you ever go up there, folks—and I encourage you; it's a really beautiful part of the province—if you want to get a smile out of somebody, an acknowledgement that you're an insider, just say you know Billy Murdoch, because there's nobody up there who doesn't know him and doesn't like him, and it appears there's nobody up there who doesn't vote for him.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate today. I'll say right from the outset that I think this is a bill that should be supported by all members of this House, and I think it's one that really shows the sort of innovative thinking that we need in this province.

We look back to our forefathers, those people who decided that perhaps we should have a medical system that was different from the rest of the world and that if you got sick, we would look after you; if you got sick you didn't go to the bank first, you went to the hospital or you went to the doctor. The people who came before us, like Tommy Douglas, Pearson and J.S. Woodsworth, put into place a health care system that we should be proud of.

Since that date, we've had debates, we've talked to all aspects of this, and one challenge has always been the affordability. How do we match that expectation from a health care perspective with affordability from a taxpayer perspective? I think the type of innovative thinking that's being shown today by the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound is something that's worthy of consideration and should move forward.

A previous speaker talked about private members' bills that don't make it. Sometimes we should focus on the positive, and that's those private members' bills that do make it. You think of the member for Brant, for example, who brought forward a terrific private member's bill that dealt with allergies, anaphylaxis, and that became government policy; Firefighters' Memorial Day, for example, the same member from Brant. You look at the member for Sault Ste. Marie, who brought forward the Apology Act and something that prohibited smoking in cars with children. You look at the member for Willowdale, who brought forward some excellent legislation on boating. So it really proves that private members' bills can change things if they have substance behind them, and obviously, if they get the support of this House. I think this government has shown the willingness to include that. Mr. O'Toole just had some success the other day with cellphones.

The last time I checked, Mr. O'Toole was not a Liberal and didn't plan on becoming one. The last time I checked, the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound

wasn't a Conservative either. So we've got some people moving around here.

If you see a bill like this that comes forward, a private member's bill that has the support of such organizations as the March of Dimes and the Canadian Paraplegic Association, regardless of the party membership of the member who has brought it forward—he's probably the most private member in this House right now. He certainly should have a private member's bill attached to his name. This is one that is worthy of support. This is one that I think is going to find support among service clubs, community initiatives, people who want to help out their neighbours, people who want to help out their friends, families and people in the community who perhaps need some help. This, to me, seems to be an extra incentive that would allow somebody to perhaps put their hand in their wallet, make a donation, make some sort of a charitable initiative that would allow somebody to have a much better life. It's that simple.

I think there's been a change in the way that society is looking and thinking about disabilities. This type of innovative thinking brought forward by the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound is an example to us all of the type of thinking we should be undertaking as we look for new ways to make our health care system the best in the world, but also affordable and efficient. This is right in line with this.

As I said, despite the previous comments about private members' bills not going anywhere, I suspect this is a private member's bill that has a chance of going somewhere and should be supported.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, Mr. Murdoch, you have up to two minutes for your response.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I certainly want to thank every one who spoke on this bill today.

First, I'm going to start off with the member for Mississauga-Streetsville. If you took out of my earlier remarks that it was just a pittance that we pay, I'm sorry, because that's not what I meant. I do understand that we have many programs within the government that help people out. Sometimes it's hard to get through the red tape, and that's what I was talking about. I know you did mention only up to 75%. That's why part of this bill, though, will help out because if they got that much, then someone else could help them with the rest and it would top it up and they would be able to claim it. So that's the reasoning behind this bill.

Also, I'd like to mention that all three governments since I've been here have supported things like this, so it's not that one government can take claim on helping out people with disabilities. I believe all three parties have done that. I have had the privilege of sitting with all three parties, so I just wanted to mention that also.

Interjections.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: Maybe it was the fourth one. I guess, at this point, the fourth party hasn't been the gov-

enment but maybe; there's always hope, you never know.

We also had the members for Dufferin—Caledon, Trinity—Spadina, London—Fanshawe, Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, Welland and Oakville. All those members spoke in favour of this bill. I was contemplating here that maybe, since we all support it, we could have gone for third reading and forgotten about going to committee, but that may not happen. So when we get to which committee, we'll certainly work hard and I will be here to remind you that everyone supported it. If it doesn't come to a committee, I'll be here to remind you that it's not coming along. We hope this bill does get passed in the near future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

DIABETES AWARENESS MONTH ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LE MOIS DE LA SENSIBILISATION AU DIABÈTE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will first deal with ballot item number 52, standing in the name of Mrs. Mangat. Mrs. Mangat has moved second reading of Bill 113, An Act to proclaim the month of November Diabetes Awareness Month in Ontario. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I ask that Bill 113 be referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it agreed that the bill be referred to the standing committee? Agreed. So ordered.

SINGLE-USE BOTTLED WATER BAN ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 INTERDISANT LES BOUTEILLES D'EAU JETABLES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We'll now deal with ballot item number 53, standing in the name of Mr. Kular. Mr. Kular has moved second reading of Bill 112, An Act to prohibit the sale of single-use plastic bottles of water in Ontario. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard some nos.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Sorry, I didn't see that. We'll call in the members after we deal with the next ballot item.

TAXATION AMENDMENT ACT (EQUIPMENT PURCHASED FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES IMPÔTS (ACHAT D'APPAREILS POUR LES PERSONNES HANDICAPÉES)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will now deal with ballot item number 54, standing in the name of Mr. Murdoch. Mr. Murdoch has moved second reading of Bill 109, An Act to provide a tax credit for the purchase of equipment or devices for persons with disabilities. Is it the pleasure of the House that motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: Would this bill be able to go to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills? That would be a good committee to hear it. They have lots of time to discuss it.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I hear a no with respect to that request. Would the government like to suggest something else?

We can do a vote on this matter. The honourable member has asked that the bill be referred to the committee on private bills.

Mr. Peter Kormos: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would ask for unanimous consent to allow the mover of this bill on second reading to propose another committee choice.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Do we have unanimous consent to propose another committee? Agreed. Mr. Murdoch?

Interjections.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: Yes, they could. Unfortunately, a lot of the other committees are full, and that's what we talked about.

Interjection: Bill, try estimates.

Interjection: They're trying to bury you.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: It seems that way. I don't know whether I have any time to talk to the whip over there, who seems to be wanting to put this into another committee. That's why we talked around here—I would have even liked to ask for third reading, but I didn't because I thought we would pick a committee that had lots of time.

Interjection.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: You're saying the general government would work. I've seen that happen before, and we sat here for three weeks. I guess if that's where we're going to have to put it—you're going to out-vote us anyway, so—

Interjection: It's your choice.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I know it's my choice.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Okay.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Just one moment. We'll take a vote on that.

Those in favour of referring the bill to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills, please stand.

Unfortunately, the motion fails. The bill will now be referred to the committee of the whole House as per the standing orders.

Mr. Peter Kormos: On a point of order, please, Speaker: unanimous consent, notwithstanding the vote and the Speaker's referral, as a result of the vote, to committee of the whole, to allow this bill to go to the social policy committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Do we have unanimous consent? Agreed. The bill will be referred to the social policy committee. Thank you.

We will now call in the members, a five-minute bell, to deal with the ballot item.

The division bells rang from 1613 to 1618.

SINGLE-USE BOTTLED WATER

BAN ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 INTERDISANT

LES BOUTEILLES D'EAU JETABLES

Mr. Kular moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 112, An Act to prohibit the sale of single-use plastic bottles of water in Ontario / Projet de loi 112, Loi interdisant la vente de bouteilles d'eau en plastique jetables en Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We'll deal with ballot item number 53, standing in the name of Mr. Kular. Mr. Kular has moved second reading of Bill 112, An Act to prohibit the sale of single-use plastic bottles of water in Ontario. All those in favour of the motion will please rise and remained standing.

Ayes

Best, Margaret	Dhillon, Vic	Qaadri, Shafiq
Broten, Laurel C.	Kormos, Peter	Sergio, Mario
Cansfield, Donna H.	Kular, Kuldir	
Colle, Mike	Marchese, Rosario	

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): All those opposed to the motion will please rise and remain standing.

Nays

Balkissoon, Bas	Hudak, Tim	Rinaldi, Lou
Barrett, Toby	Jaczek, Helena	Sandals, Liz
Chudleigh, Ted	Jeffrey, Linda	Scott, Laurie
Delaney, Bob	Jones, Sylvia	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Elliott, Christine	Moridi, Reza	Zimmer, David
Hardeman, Ernie	Murdoch, Bill	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 10; the nays are 17.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I declare the motion lost.

Second reading negated.

TIME ALLOCATION

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): All matters relating to private members' public business having been completed, I do now call orders of the day.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: On a point of order: The Speaker will be aware that this morning, or sometime today, we had a debate on a closure motion on Bill 119, the bill that inflicts upon all small businesses in Ontario an extra \$11,000 charge per year for compensation.

The challenge is that that closure motion had a number of items in it that were to occur, and the times when they were to occur. One of the things that was to occur was a subcommittee meeting to discuss the procedure of how we would get to the hearings process and get the bill back into the House in record time.

The challenge, of course, is that a subcommittee meeting was held with the absence of one of the parties in this Legislature. I have here a page from the manual for the committee on social policy. It says: "That subcommittee on committee business be appointed to meet from time to time, at the call of the Chair or on the request of any member thereof, to consider and report to the committee on the business of the committee, and that the subcommittee be composed of the following members—the committee Chair," and then the three, "and that the presence of all the members of the subcommittee is necessary to constitute a meeting."

We're told that we have in fact held a teleconference, that they were notified—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. I'd say to the member from Oxford that Speakers have consistently ruled that matters arising from the committee should be dealt with in the committee. They are not matters for the House unless the committee reports those matters formally to the House. So I rule it is not a point of order.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: My question is not about the subcommittee or the committee. My question is about the rules that were passed today, in record time from the House, telling the committee what to do, and the House's rules are not being followed. That's the challenge we're facing here—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I apologize to the member, but it is still a matter regarding committees. It should be dealt with at committee. It's not a matter for the House or the Speaker at this time.

Orders of the day.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I hear a no.

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

This House stands adjourned until Monday, November 17, at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1624.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Steve Peters

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Aggelonitis, Sophia (LIB)	Hamilton Mountain	
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Arthurs, Wayne (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (LIB)	London West / London-Ouest	Attorney General / Procureur général
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / Ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Broten, Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Brown, Michael A. (LIB)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development / Ministre du Développement économique
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
		Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
		Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Carroll, Hon. / L'hon. M. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	Minister of Culture / Ministre de la Culture
		Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craiton, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (LIB)	Essex	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
		Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
		Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
		Minister of Revenue / Ministre du Revenu

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby—Oshawa	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (LIB)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora—Rainy River	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington	
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Monday 17 November 2008

Lundi 17 novembre 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 17 November 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 17 novembre 2008

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a Hindu prayer.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I would like to welcome Heather Nicolson-Morrison, Mike Pohanka, and Brian and Monika Warren. Thank you for coming to the House today. These are members of the Ontario Home Respiratory Services Association.

They are hosting a luncheon here at Queen's Park to raise awareness about chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, with this year's theme being Breathless not Helpless. Welcome to Queen's Park. They're in the east gallery.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's my pleasure today to introduce to the House my granddaughter Janessa Marie Labadie. She's up in the gallery there with her grandmother Elizabeth Bailey.

Mr. Joe Dickson: I'm pleased to introduce Kurtis McAleer, a very young, motivated political student who's here as our guest. He is here in the west gallery, and he's from Ajax-Pickering.

Hon. John Milloy: I'd like to welcome the members of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance and the College Student Alliance to Queen's Park today.

They are here for the next three days to meet with members from all sides of the House on behalf of the students they represent. I know everyone will join me in welcoming them to Queen's Park this week.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We have with us today in the Speaker's gallery a delegation from the Council of State Governments, Midwestern Legislative Conference, legislative exchange program.

They are Representative Laura Brod from Minnesota, Representative Scott Reske from Indiana, and Ilene Grossman, the assistant director of the MLC. Please join me in warmly welcoming our guests today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

ORAL QUESTIONS

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Premier: Premier, during your two-week trip overseas this month, Ontario

has become, for the first time in history, a have-not province receiving equalization payments. In other words, Dalton McGuinty's Ontario is now on the welfare rolls of Confederation.

What will make Ontario's economic challenges even greater in the future is the loss in Ontario of auto manufacturing and auto parts jobs. To date, you have spent some \$1 billion of taxpayers' money, only to see 30,000 auto sector jobs lost, such as GM in Oshawa; Chrysler in Brampton, 1,100 jobs; and Linamar Corp. in Guelph, 500.

Premier, you said the other day that you would not flow any more dollars unless it was in the public interest—a very vague term. We've seen these job losses. What job guarantees will you bring forward? How many more job losses do you define as the public interest?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I could say it's good to be back. I could say that. It is good to be back and I welcome the question. You will know I was on a trade mission to China together with Minister Chan, and I am pleased to report that we signed over \$600 million in new contracts and that there are some tremendous opportunities to be found in China and in other parts of the world.

We are working very closely at this point in time, myself and Minister Bryant, together with the federal government—Prime Minister Harper in particular, Minister Clement and Minister Flaherty—and Minister Duncan to see what we can do. In the United States of America, the federal government has come to the table. They are coming to the table, more so now, to provide support for the auto sector, and we are convinced that we can make common cause with the federal government and provide the necessary support. We look forward to talking more about that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: The Premier has used the term "in the public interest." He has not talked about how many job losses he will tolerate. He is not talking about job guarantees.

To date, Premier, you have spent nearly \$1 billion in taxpayers' money to the manufacturers. That works out to about \$219 per Ontario family. What have Ontario families already struggling to make ends meet in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario seen in return for their \$1-billion investment? You promised more jobs. We saw Sterling Trucks in St. Thomas recently throw 1,300 people out of work. In Vaughan, Progressive Moulded shed some 2,000 jobs.

Premier, what taxpayers need to know is, what new approach are you going to take to ensure taxpayer funds

will actually result in job creation, not job losses, in the now have-not Dalton McGuinty Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My colleague is correct in highlighting the importance of this industry for all of us, and we have experienced some losses in the automotive sector; there is no doubt about that whatsoever. But just think where we would find ourselves had we not stepped up to the plate in the past.

We had a \$500-million auto sector fund. We leveraged that into some \$7.5-billion worth of new investments, thousands of new jobs. We didn't receive support in the past. There have been some job losses, nonetheless, and I think it's clear to all concerned, all thoughtful observers, that globally the automotive sector is struggling, but particularly what we call the Detroit Three.

The US government is stepping up with, we think, a package somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$20 billion to \$25 billion. We simply cannot match that on our own here in Ontario, obviously. We are looking for some semblance of proportionality. We will work with the federal government and we will work with the auto sector to speak to jobs—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Premier. Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, on May 21 of this year, to escape the heat of GM's unfortunate announcement of closing down the Windsor plant and throwing some 1,400 jobs out of our province, you announced that a Fiat plant was practically imminent. Taxpayers are still waiting. On January 22, 2008, you ordered your staff to come up with made-in-Ontario trade barriers against Korean products. Premier, again, taxpayers are still waiting.

Your back-of-the-napkin, haphazard approach to this sector has seen nearly \$1 billion in taxpayer funds spent and 30,000 jobs lost. The unfortunate reality, Premier, is that your outdated, tax-and-spend policies and increasing red tape burden have made Ontario one of the highest cost jurisdictions in which to do business.

Premier, what are you going to do to lower the cost of doing business in our province to help our sector be more competitive internationally?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: There are about 12 Ontario communities for which the economic mainstay is automotive. Is my colleague suggesting that somehow we allow those communities to flounder? Is he suggesting that we ignore the 400,000 direct and indirect jobs that are found within the automotive sector, or is he suggesting that we forgo the \$28 billion in wealth created by the automotive sector? I think he is not suggesting that. I think what he's suggesting is that we continue to work closely with the federal government, that we work with the automotive sector, that we work with the CAW, that we work with all the communities that are affected to find some way to put Ontario's auto sector, which is the national auto sector, onto a stronger economic footing. I think that's what he's suggesting. That's the inference I draw from that. With that, I agree completely, and we will continue to work with the federal government in this regard.

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AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is for the Premier. Premier, I love Ontario and its people and I know that you do too. But Ontario is now a have-not province and has sunk to a level that even the NDP under Bob Rae didn't achieve.

It wasn't long ago that you were shovelling money out the door as fast as you could, handing out billions of dollars to auto companies in the last few years. You didn't care what models they were producing; you didn't ask for their business plans. We know full well that any job guarantees were ignored. The grants and interest-free loans came with no strings attached.

All of a sudden now, Premier, you're playing hardball; you're playing a tough guy. All of a sudden the Premier can tell auto companies about viability. Maybe he got an MBA when he was in China.

We know that we have already seen nearly 30,000 auto sector job losses since 2005. Why should we trust your wisdom now, Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to speak to the issue of "have-not." I think it was in the book *Spin Wars*, written by Bill Fox, where was coined the phrase "a convenient fiction." And there's a convenient fiction that says that when you receive equalization, you're somehow in desperate straits.

I think there's an important figure for everybody to keep in mind. This year, in 2008 and 2009, there are only three net contributors to the federation: Ontario, Alberta and BC. Ontario contributes \$23.5 billion net to the federation this year; Alberta, \$14.3 billion; and BC, \$2.7 billion. Again, we are the single largest net contributor to the federation.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Methinks the Premier protesteth too much. The facts are the facts. The fact is that Ontario is now a have-not province, something we have never achieved before, even under the government of Bob Rae.

The warning signs in the auto sector have been around since 2005, Premier, but you did nothing until the problem turned into a crisis, and it's a common theme of your government. We saw it with public finances in the looming recession, and now we see it with economic development and manufacturing. Your five-point plan is a flop. Your retraining scheme is a failure. Red tape is on the rise. Small businesses are overtaxed. The only thriving sector is the bureaucracy. Everything and everyone around the world is adjusting and shifting. The G20 came out with a five-point plan, but you've done nothing.

Premier, as the auto sector and industry change to survive, will you think beyond the short term and fundamentally change your auto policies so that we can ensure a competitive auto industry—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm finding it hard, from one question to the next, to figure out where the Conservatives stand with respect to support for the auto sector. On the basis of the first question, I got the sense that we should not touch this with an 83-foot pole. On the basis of the second question, I'm hearing that there may be some grounds for providing additional support to the auto sector.

I want to make it clear as to where we on this side of the House stand on this issue: We are not prepared to forgo 400,000 direct and indirect jobs. We're not prepared to forgo the mainstay for 12 Ontario communities. We're not prepared to forgo some \$28 billion in wealth generated on an annual basis by our auto sector.

North Americans will continue long into the future to buy millions and millions of cars. We want to keep making those cars in the province of Ontario. We will find a way, working with the federal government, with our workers and with communities, to support a stronger auto sector long into the future in our province.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Applause.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Thank you for that applause.

If success is measured by results, then the devastation in Oshawa, St. Thomas, Windsor and the rest of south-western Ontario means that your auto investment strategy has got a big "F" for "failure."

Premier, the auto industry experts agree that the Big Three must restructure to be viable and competitive in the future. In the past, you have shovelled money out the door to them, almost a billion dollars, and the results have been extremely wanting and have got us to where we are today.

Premier, when you restructure your strategies in this sector, will you end your reckless patchwork policy and move toward a plan that fosters innovation, competition, through a broad-based level playing field?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Obviously, we want to work with the sector to ensure that they continue their transformation.

In fairness, I think we should acknowledge that the sector has been going through a very painful period of transformation that has manifested itself in a number of ways, including painful job losses for Ontarians. In the midst of this painful restructuring, they were blindsided by this global economic crisis. It has resulted in some liquidity issues. They're having difficulty maintaining their ongoing operations, maintaining payment to suppliers, continuing to maintain jobs, which are all important to Ontario communities.

We are fully seized with the urgency of this matter, as are the federal government and the Prime Minister. We want to find a way to move forward in a way that's respectful of taxpayer interests, also mindful of the contribution—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question, of course, is for the Premier.

While the Premier was off on another of his visit-anywhere-but-Ontario travel junkets, the fact is that thousands more Ontarians lost their jobs. Navistar announced the layoff of 470 workers, including plant workers, office staff and management, at its truck plant in Chatham. Sterling Trucks announced that closing its plant in St. Thomas in 2010 isn't early enough; they want to close it almost immediately, laying off 1,300 more workers. And the list goes on.

My question is this: When will we see a real strategy from the McGuinty government to take on the continuing loss of thousands of good jobs in Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My colleague may find it interesting: Something that I learned on my trip to China, when I had a chance to speak with the political leaders there, is that one of the biggest economic concerns was the loss of manufacturing jobs. It's hard for us to imagine, but because of this global economic crisis, the export markets have collapsed in many parts of the world, and that has resulted in many, many manufacturing job losses in China. Today we hear that Japan, the world's second-largest economy, is now in a state of recession. So this is something that is affecting all of us.

Fortunately, we have a solid plan in place. We will continue to invest in innovation, turning good Ontario ideas into jobs for the future. We'll continue to invest in infrastructure. In that sector alone, we have some 100 major construction projects underway right now, and we plan to create over 100,000 jobs by continuing to invest in infrastructure which is badly needed in our province.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: While the Premier may be more concerned about the loss of jobs in China and Japan, I can tell him people in Ontario are mostly concerned about the loss of jobs here.

I've cited just a few figures from the auto sector. The steel sector is laying off as well: US Steel is announcing layoffs in Hamilton. The mining sector, something the McGuinty government has boasted about in the past, is laying off literally hundreds in places like Sudbury and Thunder Bay. General manufacturing: Layoffs are coming there as well.

So I want to ask the Premier again, where is this government's plan? Every time you take another foreign travel junket, thousands more in Ontario lose their jobs and we continue to see no plan from the McGuinty government. Where is the plan for the steel sector, the mining sector, the forest sector, the auto sector? Where is the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Just to give an example of how important it is to reach out to the international community, last week I was in London with my colleagues there and we celebrated the opening of a new manufac-

turing plant which was put forward by the investments made by the Hanwha group, which was a very large and successful global Fortune 500 company based in South Korea. It's making its first-ever investment in Canada. We contributed to that investment with a \$10-million loan through our advanced manufacturing investment strategy. They're building a \$70-million plant; they're creating 120 new jobs in London in manufacturing—advanced manufacturing. That's just one example of what happens when we reach out to the international community and we're prepared to enter into partnerships with those investors.

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The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: If I look at the loss of thousands of jobs in the St. Thomas and London area, the Premier seems to be saying, "Well, maybe 100 jobs will serve as a replacement for the thousands lost." This is not a successful strategy, Premier. Every time you lose 2,000, to say, "Oh, we found 100"—this is not a successful strategy; I don't care what game you're playing.

Premier, the auto parts sector has said to your government very clearly that they need some short-term financing help. They're prepared to guarantee jobs, but they need some short-term loan financing so that they can continue to make auto parts. Your government refuses to give them an answer. You continue to say, "Oh, the answer is in Washington. The answer is in Ottawa."

When is the McGuinty government going to come forward with its plan instead of looking for someone else to blame, someone else to push responsibility onto? Where is the McGuinty government's plan as thousands lose their jobs?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I learn with interest today that my colleague is now saying that we should find a way to provide support to the automotive sector. In the past he said that he would not support that.

We had a meeting, I guess it was a week ago today, in Ottawa, the Premiers and the Prime Minister. One of the things that we came to understand—it was never expressed or articulated outwardly, but the understanding is this: We are at our best in the face of this global economic challenge when we work together. We are going to find a way to address the crisis faced by our automotive sector, suppliers included, but the best way for us to do that is together with the federal government. Those conversations are continuing as we speak. There is going to be a trip to Washington to acquire all the intelligence that we can there in terms of better understanding what that government is going to do. But I'm convinced that at the end of the day we will find a way, working with the federal government, to provide additional support to Ontario's, indeed Canada's, automotive sector.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Howard Hampton: The Premier wants to refer to the auto parts sector and say somehow that I am op-

posed to helping out. I'm quite prepared to help out, and I'll tell you, the auto parts sector is prepared to provide job guarantees. I just wonder why the McGuinty government is missing in action on that front. But the Premier again refers to, "Oh, we've got to go to Washington. We have to go to Tokyo. We have to go to Ottawa"; there are too many factors beyond the McGuinty government's control.

I want to ask the Premier: Right here in Ontario, just this past week, the Premier was there for another photo op, announcing wind turbines to much boasting and patting on the back. But where were the wind turbines made? They're made in Denmark. Premier, if Ontario is going to invest in wind energy, why doesn't the McGuinty government have a strategy that says that wind turbines have to be manufactured here in Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My colleague has a good point here. I will acknowledge that. We are working hard now to see what we can do. We celebrated a success in Port Alma. There was the opening of a new wind farm, which created 70 jobs in construction and, I think, a couple of dozen jobs now for their maintenance. But what we would like to do, the icing on the cake, obviously, that will complement an aggressive renewables plan, is to ensure that we have a domestic manufacturer of wind turbines, and we are looking at ways to see what we can do to make sure that happens.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: Except, Premier, you're about five years late on this. While you say, "Oh, we have to go to Tokyo. We have to go to Washington. We have to go to London. We have to go to Ottawa," this is what Quebec has done: Quebec has invested in wind power. But they've said to those people who want to develop wind power in Quebec, "You have to manufacture in Quebec." Quebec is already out the door: 60% of the total cost of each wind farm in Quebec must be incurred in Quebec, and at least 30% of the cost of the wind turbine manufacturing must be incurred in Quebec. If the Quebec government can already do this, why is the McGuinty government, as Ontario loses thousands of jobs, only beginning to think about it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Part of the good-news story on this front is that the steel that goes into the fabrication of those turbines in Quebec actually comes from Ontario. But again, I agree with my colleague: There is more that we need to find a way to get done in this regard. In part, it comes back to—I know my colleague doesn't like to hear this, but the fact that this year we're sending \$23.5 billion for distribution in the rest of the country does compromise our ability to compete with some of our fellow provinces. There are some incentives offered in the province of Quebec—while we're talking about incentives—that are very tough for us to match. Again, if we could keep a little bit more of our own wealth, then we would have greater capacity, more financial muscle with which to muster up some of those deals.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Earlier, the Premier talked about creating a fiction. Here's the fiction the Premier wants to create. Ontarians pay taxes to the federal government just as people in British Columbia do, just as people in Quebec do, just as people in Nova Scotia do. You don't send one penny to Ottawa. Ontarians pay their taxes, just as everybody else does. But I want to get back on the real issue—the loss of jobs in Ontario.

Premier, your government has a proposal before it right now. Multibrid, a German-based turbine manufacturer, has developed a joint proposal with Trillium Power Wind, a local renewable energy developer, to build a massive wind farm on Lake Ontario. Part of their proposal would be to manufacture the turbines in Ontario. This proposal has been around for a while, Premier. Can you tell people who are losing their jobs in Ontario and would benefit from these kinds of manufacturing jobs why your government hasn't moved on it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I understand that, when it comes to this particular proposal, we are pursuing active conversations with this particular proponent and I feel very positive about it. Again, there are more steps to be taken.

Let me just say this, and I know my colleague has a particular perspective on this: We have created 500,000 net new jobs in Ontario in the course of the past five years. We are ahead by 500,000 jobs. There are 100,000 jobs today in Ontario that we can't fill because many of those demand high levels of skills. To that end, we are investing in 20,000 long-term training opportunities for folks who lose their jobs because of this global economic crisis to help them get the kind of training that will help them get the kinds of jobs that are going begging today in Ontario.

FUNDRAISING

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is also to the Premier. Tomorrow night, the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities and the Minister of Labour will be hosting a \$350-per-ticket fundraiser for the Liberal Party at the Ontario Sheet Metal Workers Training Centre in Oakville. This particular facility is a recognized training delivery agent for the government of Ontario, which means it receives tax dollars to operate its programs and purchase its equipment. So I ask the Premier, do you think—

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: A little payback.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just ask the honourable member from Halton to withdraw the comment he just made.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I withdraw.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I say to the Premier, do you think it's appropriate for your ministers to be having a fundraiser at a government-funded training centre?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think it's important for us to speak to and find ways to better understand issues put forward by all Ontarians, representing all sectors. I know my colleagues have a particular aversion to our reaching out to the labour community, but we think that's an

important responsibility that we have on this side of the House. We think we've got to be able to speak with folks in the business sector, with folks in the labour sector, and everybody in between. We are not trying to just build a strong economy, we're also trying to build a strong and caring society. That demands that we reach out and talk to folks in all the sectors, and we're going to keep doing that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: Premier, this training centre is the same thing as a government-funded hospital owned by the local community or a government-funded school owned by the school board. This happens to be a government-funded training centre owned by a union. Surely you wouldn't condone your Minister of Health hosting a fundraiser in the cafeteria of a hospital or the education minister having a fundraiser in a classroom of a high school. So why are you allowing your training and labour ministers to host a political fundraiser at a government-funded skills training centre? Surely you can see that this is a blatant conflict of interest.

1100

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I just don't think it's a fair comparison, to somehow compare hospitals and schools to a labour training centre which may or may not receive some funding, in part, from the government of Ontario. I think if we were all held to the standard that none of us can ever hold a fundraiser in any kind of a building which has ever received any government of Ontario support, then there aren't many places left in this province where we could host a fundraiser. Community centres, town halls and the like: Many of those have been beneficiaries of some provincial government funding. Again, I think it's important for us to be able to meet with Ontarians in all the sectors, the labour sector included.

POVERTY

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Despite government claims of actual past actions of the government on poverty, children in Ontario continue to suffer the pain of extreme deprivation. In today's Toronto Star, we have all read about Pamela Soutar, a Toronto mother of two whose welfare payments are so low and the rent so high that she has to try to scrape by on \$74 a month. To put that in perspective, that is 80 cents a day for herself and 80 cents a day for each of her two children. As minister responsible for poverty, what do you have to say about your past actions to Ms. Soutar, and, if you have done so much as you have claimed in the past, why is she facing such destitution?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me assure the member opposite that we acknowledge there is an issue of poverty in this province. If we did not acknowledge that, we would not be doing what we are doing, which is developing a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. Having said that, we have made important steps forward; most importantly, the Ontario child benefit. When it is fully

implemented, it will be over a billion dollars in the hands of low-income families that wasn't there before. This particular woman will benefit and does benefit from the Ontario child benefit.

There is much more to be done. There is much more to be done and we are determined to do it.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: It will take three years for those children, who have 80 cents a day on which to eat, to get that money, and you know it.

Pamela Soutar is not alone. Almost half of Ontario renters pay more than 30% of their income on rent. Many have to scrimp on food, they have to scrimp on clothing, on medications and other basic necessities. Today, groups are calling on the McGuinty government to implement a new housing benefit of up to \$200 a month to start to address the housing crisis. They say it's needed because the government's rent subsidy program, ROOF in short, is not adequate and it's not working. Will this minister commit herself to include such a benefit in this upcoming poverty reduction plan?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Our government believes that every Ontario family should have a safe place to live, a safe, healthy, affordable place to live. We are taking steps in that direction. Of course, I cannot commit to implementing this proposal in our poverty reduction strategy. The member opposite is well aware that we have a commitment to a long-term affordable housing strategy. I think this is a very interesting addition to the discourse on that topic. It's one we will take very seriously as we really turn our attention to the housing issues in this province.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I have a question to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. A major pressure in northern Ontario's hospitals results from alternative-level-of-care patients taking up hospital beds. These ALC patients do not belong in hospitals. Given the right supports, many could continue to live independently at home; others might belong in long-term care. I know the government has made significant investments in home care and long-term care, but I'm curious to find out what the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care is doing to significantly address northern Ontario's ALC issues in the short term.

The minister recently visited northeastern Ontario and spoke with both LHIN and hospital officials while on the tour. I understand that he learned about an innovative program being implemented in Timmins to relieve ALC pressures. I ask the minister: What is this program and how is it helping?

Hon. David Caplan: I want to thank the member for the question. The local health integration network in the northeast has been working proactively to find solutions to this longstanding problem, and I can tell you, and we all know, that band-aid solutions simply do not work.

The northeast LHIN has adopted and supported a wraparound strategy in Timmins. It's an innovative program—I know the member from Timmins is well familiar with it—designed to provide seniors with the support they need to live independently in their own homes, instead of in long-term care. The strategies provide extra supports, whether it's someone to cook them a meal, to do grocery shopping, or simply to rake leaves.

The wraparound strategy has been a success in Timmins. It has been credited with reducing the number of ALC patients in the Timmins and District Hospital by 40%. I'm proud to say that the wraparound strategy is being expanded by the northeast LHIN, but in addition to that, we are increasing the number of long-term-care beds in the area, and this will—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I'm glad the minister mentioned long-term care as a part of the government's strategy to resolve ALC issues in our hospitals.

Since elected, the government has opened nearly 8,000 new long-term-care beds and plans to open more than 2,000 additional beds over the next three years.

But when I speak of long-term care, I think it's important to speak in terms of quality of life. I know that many long-term-care residents' priorities stretch further than the number of beds our government has provided or the funding that we have secured. Many residents and their loved ones are concerned with living in a long-term-care home that is close to family and friends. They want to have a choice when it comes to the care they receive.

Can the Minister of Health tell the House what the government is doing to improve the quality of life for residents of Ontario's long-term-care homes?

Hon. David Caplan: That's an excellent question, and I want to thank the member again, because we are very concerned about the happiness, the care and the living situation of residents in long-term-care homes. I believe that they deserve to live with dignity, with respect, and as close to their loved ones as they possibly can. That's why the government is making it easier for residents of long-term-care residences to be closer to the home of their choice.

New regulations will enable residents in different homes to switch places, if the move is mutually desired, with first priority given to residents seeking to be reunited with a spouse or a partner, and second priority given to those seeking a home that serves the person's religion, ethnicity or language.

As part of the overarching plan to alleviate ALC pressures, these changes may also encourage hospital patients who are waiting for a long-term-care-home bed to accept a home that is not—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question.

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is to the Premier. Premier, when I recently took a look at current job

listings for the government of Ontario, I was quite surprised to see that more than 40% of those jobs were for advisers, analysts and consultants.

Premier, can you explain to Ontarians why their hard-earned tax dollars should pay for these jobs rather than hiring the 9,000 nurses so desperately needed for people in the province of Ontario in long-term-care hospitals, and for family health teams?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Government Services.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: As the member opposite will know, we from time to time look for resources that will supplement the response that we do with respect to staffing in the health care sector. We are obviously anxious to recruit the very best people we can and to do that in the context of solid policy analysis.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: That's probably one of the most pathetic answers I've ever heard. I'm not sure if anybody was aware of what the question was.

But I want to go back to the Premier. Premier, you've had \$27 billion more in revenue, and more than \$12 billion of that came from the health tax. Please tell the people in Niagara region why that money won't save their maternity ward, or the people in Hamilton why it won't stop the 500 job cuts in the hospitals.

Why would you rather cut nurses, doctors and services than freeze the hiring of more consultants and analysts?

1110

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: We're certainly on the front line when it comes to responding to all kinds of issues, from breast cancer right through to our nursing complement across the province, and food inspectors. We advertise from time to time positions that are available within the public service. If the party opposite is serious about job freezes, as they have from time to time spoken about, then the kinds of folks we're going to lose are those who can help us respond significantly and meaningfully to the health care challenges that we have.

In addition to that, we're advertising and looking for people in the meat hygiene area. We're looking for people in the enforcement/technical specialist—waste area. We're looking for a number of health care professionals, and we know this is the right approach and will put us in a better position to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. The member from Nickel Belt.

HOME CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Today a report entitled Home Care: Change We Need presents the findings of extensive cross-province consultations with Ontarians. I had asked the former minister to consult with Ontarians on home care, but he didn't agree. Today we've heard from Ontarians. They want the government

to get rid of competitive bidding in home care. Will the minister do it?

Hon. David Caplan: I think the member is referring to the Ontario Health Coalition, which today released a report. I'm very happy to receive it and to review the recommendations. Our goal on this side of the House is to secure and provide the highest quality of service possible to community care access clients. Continuity of care for patients and stability for health care workers would, of course, be at the heart of any process to choose home care providers. Our policy throughout has required that all CCACs procure high-quality client services for the best price through our public competitive procurement process that promotes fair dealings and equitable relationships between the providers and client services. We are currently reviewing the CCAC client service procurement process and the ministry's client services procurement policy and procedures for CCACs.

The ministry released interim contract management guidelines for CCACs—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Since competitive bidding was introduced a decade ago, the quality of home care has suffered, working conditions have diminished and costs have increased. Ontario is the only province in Canada with a fully competitive bidding system for home care, and even in Ontario, no other part of the health care system uses competitive bidding.

Why won't the minister agree to end competitive bidding, which has decimated home care and is causing real problems throughout the entire health care system?

Hon. David Caplan: First of all, I would disagree wholeheartedly with the premise of the member's question. In fact, we've seen a significant increase in home care funding: \$100 million alone in the last budget, which this member voted against. Since 2003-04, home care has increased by \$450 million. The member says that this sector has been devastated. I would say to the member opposite that this sector has been supported to the point that it has never seen before under previous governments, whether New Democrat or Conservative. That speaks very much to the heart of our commitment to Ontarians who require these very vital services. We are going to continue to support CCAC clients and CCACs to be able to deliver the kinds of supports and services that Ontarians would expect.

I mentioned earlier about the guidelines—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My question is for the Minister of Labour. Last Wednesday marked the third anniversary of the murder of Lori Dupont, a nurse who was stabbed to death while on the job in November 2005.

Lori Dupont was the victim of gender-based violence in the workplace. In the months and years following that

tragic incident, the issue of workplace violence has become a topic of keen interest, not only for many of my constituents, but also for concerned workers throughout Ontario as well as various stakeholder groups. Minister, can you tell us what this government has been doing to tackle this serious workplace health and safety issue?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I'd like to thank the member for her strong advocacy on this very important subject. The murder of Lori Dupont was indeed a tragedy in every sense of the word. As the member may know, a coroner's inquest was held, and some of the recommendations that were handed down by the jury were directed to the Ministry of Labour. We're currently giving those recommendations a very careful review. In the meantime, we have been working hard with our partners to look at ways to help employers and employees prevent and respond to workplace violence.

Just this past summer, my ministry conducted a consultation on workplace violence to seek input on how to deal with this complex issue. We received several submissions containing excellent advice, and we are carefully reviewing those submissions to determine what our next step in this course of action will be.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I know that you and your ministry take workplace violence very seriously, as do all of us. Workplace violence is indeed a complicated matter, one that deserves careful study and consideration. In fact, the Liberal women's caucus has also been discussing this issue.

One component of successfully addressing gender-based violence in the workplace is assisting employers, large and small, with prevention planning. I know that even prior to the consultation, your ministry had undertaken several other initiatives in order to address this issue. Can you tell us about those initiatives, Minister?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: The member is quite right: We have indeed been taking action on workplace violence. Ministry inspectors have been trained proactively to check employers' policies and programs that address violence in the workplace, especially in workplaces where the risk of violence is higher, such as health care, social services, retail establishments and others. As well, our inspectors have been trained to conduct investigations of workplace violence complaints and take enforcement action where appropriate.

The ministry has worked with the WSIB health and safety associations to develop materials such as risk audits and sample workplace violence prevention plans for employers. We've also developed a Web page about workplace violence prevention that provides helpful information and resources.

Our government does not tolerate violence in the workplace, and we will continue to do all we can to prevent it.

TAXATION

Mr. Robert Bailey: My question is for the Minister of Finance. Minister, last week St. Clair township, a municipi-

ality in my riding, was shocked to learn that MPAC has arbitrarily reduced the assessment of the Lambton generating station by 47% for this year. This means that with a stroke of a pen, 17% of the tax base of St. Clair township has been wiped out. St. Clair township did not see this coming and now will be struggling to meet their 2009 budget. Minister, what assessment assistance will you be offering to St. Clair township to make up for this loss to their tax base?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I'm proud of the fact that the McGuinty government is building two new gas-fired plants in the Sarnia area that will replace the coal-fired generation. They will be cleaner, with a better fuel, and will help our whole region deal with its air pollution problems.

MPAC does not do anything in what I would call a random way. They have a very sophisticated formula for determination of assessments that takes into account business cases. For instance, we've seen in other communities very large reductions in the valuation of some operations. I'll have a look at that particular case, but again, in terms of the multi-million dollar investment we're making in the Sarnia area for new jobs and cleaner energy, we think, unlike the member opposite, that that's the right way to go.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I see why this is called question period and not answer period.

In 2008, St. Clair township had a total combined budget of just over \$6 million, of which the Lambton generating station accounted for \$2.3 million. In 2009, the generating station's portion of the tax levy will slip to \$1.13 million, a \$1.17-million reduction off of a \$6-million budget. This means that the residents of St. Clair township are now looking at an average 17% tax increase just to provide those same services in 2009.

Minister, what actions will you take to see that the residents of St. Clair township don't see a 17% tax increase?

1120

Hon. Dwight Duncan: First of all, again, there are two new energy plants being built in the area and they will contribute to the region's economy.

Secondly, we're uploading Ontario Works benefits: \$425 million to municipalities. That member voted against it. We are uploading court security costs, which that member and his party downloaded. That will save the taxpayers of St. Clair township—which that member voted against. This year, \$1.1 billion in additional money for infrastructure—that money flowed to every municipality last week. That member and his party voted against it.

I will look into the specifics of this individual case, but I have to reemphasize that our government has been clear: We're building two new major gas-fired plants in the region, which are creating employment, creating jobs and cleaning up the environment. That—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

HATE CRIMES

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is for the Attorney General. Earlier this month, a couple was attacked outside a school in Oshawa by a man who first verbally abused them for being lesbians, then physically assaulted them. Even more horrifyingly, this incident took place in front of the couple's six-year-old son and a number of other children and parents. It is the responsibility of this government to send a clear message that discrimination and hate will absolutely not be tolerated in Ontario. Will the Attorney General arrange for a public statement of the crown attorney in Durham region on his or her intent to prosecute this matter as a hate crime?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Without commenting on the specific case, I share the member's outrage at any hate-based crime or action. We are all outraged by those actions. We are determined to investigate them, and I know the police investigate them thoroughly, and we prosecute them to the full extent of the law. As my friend knows, there are specific offences in the Criminal Code that deal with specific crimes. For any criminal offence, if hate or sexual orientation has been found to be an aggravating factor, it is taken into consideration and the sentence reflects the hateful approach. We will prosecute any offence that is hate-based to the full extent of the law.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'm afraid that outrage is not enough. A terrible incident like this indicates that in Ontario today, this government is falling shamefully short in promoting greater public awareness of the realities of violence against women and minorities, particularly vulnerable members of the LBGT community.

What assurances and provisions will the Attorney General make on behalf of this government to ensure that this and any hate crimes against any minorities in Ontario will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I agree with the colleague's outrage. We all share the outrage over any offence that is motivated by hate or any other similar sentiment. We prosecute them to the full extent of the law. The police investigate them to the full extent of the law. We use the tools in the Criminal Code to make sure that the community's outrage is fully expressed.

Several years ago, as a government, we set up a hate crimes working group, under my colleague Michael Bryant, with a number of recommendations. We brought in grant and funding programs to make sure that there were community-based approaches to building understanding and to addressing the root causes of hate.

We are taking a broad approach to the issues, both on the basis of the community and to ensure that no one who commits an offence motivated by race or hate will get away with it. It is simply not tolerated.

LANGUAGE TRAINING

Mr. Bob Delaney: My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. Half of all newcomers to

Canada make Ontario their home. These newcomers make important social, economic and cultural contributions, and they're a vital part of Ontario's diverse workforce. In western Mississauga, one can literally hear hundreds of different languages, dialects and accents. This cultural and linguistic diversity is a strength and it allows Ontario to compete with anywhere in the world.

However, this same linguistic diversity is often a drawback to newcomers. Newcomers come to Ontario with many skills; however, the ability to speak English or French is often a barrier to meaningful employment. My constituents have expressed their concern about this very issue. Will the minister tell this House how Ontario intends to equip newcomers with language skills to reduce this barrier to employment?

Hon. Michael Chan: I want to thank the honourable member for the question.

The honourable member is correct. Newcomers face many barriers to success. The McGuinty government understands that the ability to speak French or English is often one of them. This is why last week I was pleased to announce the adult ESL/FLS funding for the 2008-09 fiscal year.

Now more than ever, it is important that we invest in the skills and the training of Ontarians. That's why I announced close to \$60 million to be invested in adult non-credit language training. In fact, for the 2008-09 fiscal year, funding has been increased by more than 8%. This will allow more than 100,000 Ontarians to receive the language training that they need to succeed.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Bob Delaney: The unemployment of newcomers, or underemployment, continues to be a major issue across Ontario. The vast majority of newcomers to Ontario are economic immigrants. They tend to be highly educated and they're strongly motivated to work and to contribute to our province. These newcomers are vital to Ontario's continued economic growth. They bring much-needed skills. They help Ontario address its labour market needs. Very often, highly skilled newcomers have some knowledge of English or French, but not enough to ensure employment in their field of training or experience.

Will the minister tell us what Ontario is doing to break down barriers for newcomers so that they can find employment in the field in which they've been trained or have experience?

Hon. Michael Chan: The McGuinty government understands that when newcomers succeed, Ontario succeeds. That's why, since 2003, my ministry has increased adult English-as-a-second-language and French-as-a-second-language funding by 22%.

Currently, 35 English and four French school boards across the province provide language training. This means that no matter where a newcomer chooses to settle, they will have access to the language training they need to succeed and compete.

I'm pleased to say that, currently, my ministry is conducting a review of the language training programs. This review is designed to ensure that in the future those

needing this training will have access to a simpler, better-coordinated system which I am sure will benefit newcomers.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: My question is to the Minister of Education. Minister, your parliamentary assistant, Mrs. Sandals, met with a mother whose child was repeatedly abused in the school system under your watch. This mother wants to make sure that no other child has to suffer through that same kind of abuse that her son has, and wants to see mandatory reporting implemented in our schools. When the mother asked your government to implement mandatory reporting, I am told that your PA said your role was primarily fiscal, that that policy creation did not fall under your purview.

Minister, do you stand by your PA's description of your job being primarily fiscal?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think the member opposite knows perfectly well that we are intimately involved with policy development in this ministry and it's extremely important to us that we have the right policies in place for the children in this province.

My parliamentary assistant, the member for Guelph, has worked assiduously since she was elected, really, on safe-schools issues. She has led the safe schools action team. She has a working knowledge of safe schools issues in this province and has helped us to put both policies and financial investments into the system that have made the schools in our province much safer. What she's working on now is developing recommendations on issues of gender violence and sexual assault, and looking at where there could be gaps in reporting and making recommendations on how to tighten those reporting gaps.

1130

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: Minister, after leaving the discussion with your parliamentary assistant, this mother has no confidence that anything is being done at all. The reality is that our children are not safe in their schools on your watch, and your PA does not understand the basic role your ministry plays in our system. After meeting with your PA, this mother, whose motivation is protecting the vulnerable—that's her only motivation—who have been victimized in Ontario schools concluded that you will not act.

Minister, it's time to stop commissioning reports. It's time for action. How many more children must suffer before you finally take action and implement mandatory reporting?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I understand the imperatives of politics that would force the member opposite to frame this issue in this way. I also understand that I had a meeting with the parents who were here, when they were in the House. My parliamentary assistant and members of my staff met with those parents. I also understand the painful realities of parents who have had an issue like this to deal with in their kids' school and with their own children.

What I can say to the member opposite and what I've said to the parents is that we are acting, we have been acting, we have changed the rules, we have put more adults in place, and we will continue to put the resources in place and make the regulatory and legislative changes that need to be made to make our schools the very safest they can be.

I know that the member opposite, when she goes into schools in Burlington, is very aware of how hard the people in those schools work within the framework that the ministry puts in place to keep those schools safe, and that's—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

CORNWALL COMMUNITY HOSPITAL

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Health. The Cornwall Community Hospital is undergoing a \$60-million redevelopment. Over \$20 million has been raised from municipalities and local donors, including members of the building trades. But the hospital didn't establish any requirements for the contractors to hire local workers, meaning that Cornwall area tradespeople won't enjoy employment benefit from the hospital's redevelopment. Why won't the Minister of Health move to ensure that hospitals hire local before looking outside a community for workers?

Hon. David Caplan: This is one project of over 100, I think, the Premier earlier referred to—nothing less than a health care renaissance. We are seeing a revitalization and a reinvestment into our health care infrastructure as we have never seen before.

Interjection.

Hon. David Caplan: The Minister of Energy and Infrastructure mentions Winchester, Cornwall—there are a number of others in eastern Ontario.

It is not the Ministry of Health which determines which contractors do which work. It is done as a competitive-bidding process, as the member will understand. The trades and the sub-trades are determined by the individual contractors. Our job is to ensure that we have the investment and the modernization of our vital health care infrastructure. I know that is something that this member and all members of the House do support. It's long overdue that we got on with this—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'll be looking forward to talking to my fellow tradesmen about your answer.

Cornwall area residents expect that the millions of dollars they raised to support their hospital will be recycled into their community. That doesn't happen when contractors hire workers from outside Cornwall. We should employ local workers when rebuilding our hospitals; it only makes sense in today's economy, with job losses.

Will the Minister of Health commit to ensuring that procurement policies are put into place so that local trades benefit first from hospital redevelopment?

Hon. David Caplan: That's precisely what is happening right now in the province of Ontario, where it is local trades and local suppliers who are receiving the first amount of the work. It is unprecedented, the amount of work that we have going on in this province. I'm very proud to be a member of a government which has made this unprecedented level of investment. That's creating, as I say, nothing less than a health care renaissance in the province of Ontario. I thank the member for the question.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for question period has ended. There being no deferred vote, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1135 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Julia Munro: I would like to introduce the students of Mr. Jeff Simpson's grade 11 class from Keswick High School, here today in the assembly.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

EDUCATION LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Peter Shurman: Earlier today, I joined a group of York University students who banded together under the appropriate title yorknothostage.com online in protest of the current strike at their university. I attended their rally and I am now here to deliver their message to Premier McGuinty, the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities and to shake this government into action.

That message is simply: It's about time. It's about time that students were not treated as pawns. It's about time that this strike came to an end so that students can get back to their lecture halls. It's about time that this government took a stand and supported the students who are bearing the brunt of this strike. It's not their idea of how to learn about collective bargaining, nor is it mine.

I join them in that message and add my very own: Let's get the striking employees back to work. Let's get an objective bargaining process. Let's lose the unreasonable union demands, and let's get to a fair and responsible agreement so that students can do what they are supposed to be doing right now, which is getting an education.

Attending university is the biggest investment that young adults can make. This government has a responsibility to ensure that their investment is not sabotaged by unreasonable and irresponsible demands that do not put students first.

YOUTH VIOLENCE

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I just want to take this minute and a half to congratulate the Honourable Roy

McMurtry and Dr. Alvin Curling for the report that they produced, the Review of the Roots of Youth Violence. It's one heck of a big report, a lot of pages of study. They talk about the roots of youth violence, which is what we talk about as well, because unless you deal with issues of poverty, you're not going to solve many of the issues connected to youth violence. Unless you deal with issues of racism, you're not going to be able to deal with some of the problems of youth violence. Unless you deal with the problems of social exclusion, you're going to have a difficult time dealing with the problems of youth violence. Unless you deal with the prospects or the inability to get a job, then you feel a sense of hopelessness. These are the issues that they tackle in this big report, and I agree with them; they need to be tackled.

I do not agree with them, however, when they talk about race-based statistics, because I don't believe we need to do that. I believe we have enough information gathered over the last 30 or 40 years that clearly speaks to us and informs us about how to tackle the issues of poverty. In my mind, the Premier obviously latched onto that as a way of not dealing with this problem, but my view is, we know enough. Don't bury this report. Deal with it. Take some action.

CRIME PREVENTION

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: As you know, Ontario recently celebrated Crime Prevention Week, and I'm pleased to share with members of this Legislature the work that is being done by a great group in my riding of Ottawa Centre.

Since 2005, Crime Prevention Ottawa has been working diligently to develop a community-wide strategic plan to reduce crime and enhance community safety in Ottawa. Crime Prevention Ottawa has worked collaboratively in partnership with organizations such as the Ottawa Police Service, United Way Ottawa, the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa and Ottawa's four school boards.

I'm extremely proud of the work undertaken by Crime Prevention Ottawa in my riding. They play an important role in our community by educating residents on how to report incidents of crime, conducting valuable research on the causes of crime and taking the lead on crime prevention initiatives such as Together for Vanier, Ottawa Youth Justice Services Network and Ottawa Youth Gang Prevention Initiative.

During Crime Prevention Week, Crime Prevention Ottawa hosted a speaker series entitled Invest in our Children and Youth: Prevent Crime, where the chief of Ottawa police, Vern White, and a youth panel came together to discuss how building safe communities for tomorrow requires investments in our children, youth and families.

I want to commend all the members of Crime Prevention Ottawa, including Nancy Worsfold, executive director, and Michael Justinich, business analyst, for their hard work and their dedication to crime prevention in

Ottawa Centre. Their efforts have helped to create a safer and more prosperous Ottawa for everyone. Thank you.

WATER QUALITY

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased to rise to talk today about an event that's occurring not only in my riding but across the province. It's called "Walk for Water."

First Nation leader Danny Beaton and the chief organizer of the event, Stephen Ogden, have left the township of Tiny and are walking over the next seven days to Queen's Park, along with a number of politicians and community people who are interested in the issue of the site 41 landfill. That landfill has got its final approvals and may have received its final water taking permit to construct a facility. However, there are still a number of concerns following the Walkerton inquiry and the 30-year history of this particular landfill approval process. We still have a lot of people in the riding who are very concerned about it, including Dr. William Shotyk, from the University of Heidelberg, who has sampled water from this particular site, and the conclusions are that it's amongst the best water on the planet.

I want to thank everyone who has participated. I took part myself for four hours the other morning. I want to thank the media attention to it as well. We are hoping that, in the end, we can convince the Minister of the Environment not to issue the water taking permit and to protect the clean water that exists below the site in the township of Tiny.

HABITAT FOR HUMANITY

Mr. Kuldip Kular: On November 5, I had the great honour to join in welcoming two Brampton families to a home just refurbished by the Brampton chapter of Habitat for Humanity. Transforming the historic George Elliott House into a home for modern families was no easy task, nor was moving the building from the original location to its current one. When a community gathers around a single cause, however, work becomes easier. The impossible is made possible. This single project is deserving of recognition.

Habitat for Humanity is active throughout Brampton, Ontario, Canada and the world. It is estimated that every 21 minutes, this organization builds a new home. For their part, the Brampton chapter plans to complete 10 homes by 2010. This is an ambitious and virtuous goal. As an international, non-profit, faith-based organization, Habitat for Humanity is in the business of building homes and also of building stronger communities by promoting home ownership as a means to breaking the cycle of poverty.

I wish to thank the volunteers, sponsors and partners, especially those in my own community of Bramalea-Gore-Malton, for their hard work and loyalty to their cause and for helping to make Brampton a better place to live.

STROUD EARLY YEARS CENTRE

Mrs. Julia Munro: Less than two weeks from today, the Early Years Centre in Stroud will be shut down. Last Friday I joined with parents and children from the centre, as they demonstrated to keep the centre open. It will close because the McGuinty Liberal government will not give it the funding it needs to stay open. This is not some sort of optional service for parents and children in Innisfil. This is a vital and necessary service.

Early childhood development is the key to the health and well-being of every child. Centres like the one in Stroud teach skills and give advice to new parents. Parents can access health and developmental services to those infants in need. If they cannot go to the centre in Stroud, where do you expect them to go?

Innisfil is also a community that your Places to Grow plan has declared a high-growth area. It is full of young families, many of them new arrivals with few ties to the area. To families in Innisfil, the Early Years Centre is vital. Do the right thing. Give it the money to keep it open.

1310

HOCKEY FRANCHISE

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I rise in the House today to express my support for a relocation or an expansion of a second NHL team to the Hamilton and greater Toronto area and to invite other people to support my petition.

The Hamilton and greater Toronto area, no doubt, has the best and the biggest market in the entire world for hockey. Currently, the Toronto Maple Leafs have the highest ticket revenue per game amongst all teams in the NHL. The Toronto Maple Leafs, however, have not won the Stanley Cup for over 40 years.

If you look throughout North America, you've got two or more hockey teams that are present in cities like Los Angeles and New York. Many local fans and families talk of either not being able to access tickets or not being able to afford tickets to professional hockey in Toronto. A second NHL team would be great for the local economy and for our province. We would anticipate revenue for approximately another 40-plus home games throughout a season. Some reports in the newspaper have stated that the value of a second NHL club would range between \$400 million and \$600 million—and just think of the rivalry when both Toronto teams play each other.

I invite everyone, including all Leafs fans like myself, to support the petition and help advocate for a second NHL franchise for the Hamilton and greater Toronto area.

SHAW FESTIVAL

Mr. Kim Craitor: Earlier this year, the government provided the famous Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake with a \$170,000 marketing assistance grant to supplement the marketing of their 2008 season.

This morning, the Shaw Festival reported that, as a result of this government's investment, their attendance was 6% ahead of the 2006 season, with a 9% increase in revenue. That's really great news. This increase represents an additional economic impact, not just to my riding of Niagara Falls, but to the province of Ontario of over \$7.3 million; in other words, \$43 for every dollar the government invested—not a bad rate of return.

I know this House joins with me on congratulating the actors, the management and the staff for such an outstanding season. We wish them continued success for next year's season, which I am hearing is going to be truly spectacular. Come out to the Shaw Festival. Bravo, Shaw.

GO TRANSIT

Mr. Bob Delaney: As the autumn weather turns into another cold winter, many of us who commute in the GTA turn our thoughts to leaving our car at home and using public transit to get to work, to get to school, or to get into downtown Toronto. Cold-weather commuting takes longer no matter what you ride to get there. So GO Transit has made some improvements to keep their trains and buses running on time this season and to minimize the inconvenience to passengers when the winter weather blows coldest.

These initiatives include installing more hot air blowers to keep track switches clear of ice and snow; an enhanced switch maintenance program; testing protective switch covers to prevent snow and ice buildup; a new advisory committee on customer services; around-the-clock winter track maintenance, which started last week; and dedicated GO staff working directly with the railways to allow faster response to issues.

If you ride GO Transit, as I do, please pick up some of GO Transit's "GO in the snow" pamphlets available at all stations. As well, today is GO Transit day at Queen's Park. GO is hosting a reception this afternoon in the legislative dining room. GO staff will be there to answer questions and discuss issues with members.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Mr. Pat Hoy: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and move its adoption.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

Bill 114, An Act respecting Budget measures, interim appropriations and other matters, to amend the Ottawa Congress Centre Act and to enact the Ontario Capital Growth Corporation Act, 2008 / Projet de loi 114, Loi

concernant les mesures budgétaires, l'affectation anticipée de crédits et d'autres questions, modifiant la Loi sur le Centre des congrès d'Ottawa et édictant la Loi de 2008 sur la Société ontarienne de financement de la croissance.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to the order of the House dated November 3, 2008, the bill is ordered for third reading.

PETITIONS

ONTARIO SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Bill 50, subsection 11(1), states Ontario SPCA inspectors and (volunteer) agents 'have and may exercise any of the powers of a police officer';

"Whereas Bill 50, section 6, states, 'the society shall have such officers with such powers and duties as are provided in the bylaws of the society,' and section 6.1(3) states, 'The chief inspector of the society may have additional powers and duties as are provided in the bylaws of the society';

"Whereas Bill 50, subsection 11.1(1), states, 'Every person who owns or has custody or care of an animal shall comply with the prescribed standards of care';

"Whereas Bill 50, subsection 11.4(1), states, 'An inspector or (volunteer) agent of the society may, without a warrant, enter and inspect any building or place used for animal exhibit, entertainment, boarding, hire or sale'; and

"Whereas over 70 letters requesting amendments to Bill 50 were delivered to each of Minister Bartolucci, Ombudsman Marin, Lieutenant Governor Onley and Premier McGuinty on October 27, 2008;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(1) That the Legislative Assembly direct the provincial government to legislatively enshrine Ontario SPCA oversight, accountability and transparency and make public the bylaws of the Ontario SPCA;

"(2) That the Legislative Assembly direct the provincial government to publicize 'prescribed standards of care' so that the citizens of Ontario may know what is expected of them under Bill 50;

"(3) That the Legislative Assembly direct the provincial government to amend Bill 50 keeping in mind section 8, section 12 and section 52.1 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms."

HOSPICES

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas hospices on church or hospital property do not pay taxes;

“Whereas hospices are not-for-profit organizations providing emotional, spiritual and bereavement support and respite care to terminally ill individuals and their family members;

“Whereas a residential hospice (usually an eight-to-10 bed home-like facility) provides around-the-clock care to terminally ill individuals and support to their families;

“Whereas hospice services are provided free of charge;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to allow hospices across the province to be exempt from municipal taxes.”

I sign it and send it with page Brittney.

PENSION PLANS

Mr. John O'Toole: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly that reads as follows:

“Whereas consumers rely on timely and accurate information from insurance companies and other financial institutions when they apply for access to locked-in pension funds;

“Whereas the disclosure of wrong or incomplete information about pension fund access can have devastating consequences for the consumer;

“Whereas the Financial Services Commission of Ontario (FSCO) is currently limited in its power to enforce standards for the disclosure of information about access to pension funds;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to enact the necessary laws or regulations that will enable the Financial Services Commission of Ontario (FSCO) to hold financial institutions fully accountable for information they give clients about access to pension funds....”

I'm pleased to sign and support this and give this to Zac, one of the new pages here at Queen's Park.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm pleased to introduce a petition. I want to thank Ruth Daigle from St. Catharines for providing me with this petition.

“Many children in the Niagara region diagnosed with autism are currently being denied appropriate treatment because of a shortfall in provincial funding.

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario for immediate and full funding for all of these children.”

I'm pleased to sign my signature in support of this petition.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services has launched a blatant attack on our province's grandparents raising their at-risk grandchildren by cutting off access to the temporary care assistance program;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Legislature call on the minister to overturn her July 2008 directives outlining the temporary care assistance program and grant all grandparents raising their at-risk grandchildren access to this much-needed financial support.”

I agree with this petition and will affix my name to it. Swapnil will bring it down.

1320

ONTARIO SOCIETY
FOR THE PREVENTION
OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Mr. Mike Colle: I'd like to read more petitions among the thousands I've read into the Legislature in support of Bill 50, the provincial animal welfare act.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act has not been updated since 1919;

“Whereas Bill 50 would require all veterinarians to report suspected abuse and neglect, protecting veterinarians from liability;

“Whereas it would allow the OSPCA to inspect and investigate places where animals are kept;

“Whereas the bill would prohibit the training of animals to fight;

“Whereas Bill 50 would allow the OSPCA to inspect roadside zoos;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 50, entitled the Provincial Animal Welfare Act, 2008, to protect our animal friends.”

I support this petition and I affix my name to it.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): There appearing to be no further petitions, I will call orders of the day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROVINCIAL ANIMAL
WELFARE ACT, 2008LOI ONTARIENNE DE 2008
SUR LE BIEN-ÊTRE DES ANIMAUX

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 7, 2008, on the motion for third reading of Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty

to Animals Act / Projet de loi 50, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Société de protection des animaux de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a delight to be able to speak on behalf of animals in the province of Ontario, not only the two-legged kind, but others.

I have to start by saying—somebody just gave me this quote, which I really do have to share with the House: "To err is human; to forgive, canine." You've got to like that.

I also want to acknowledge that we have in the House Mr. Michael O'Sullivan and Mr. Tim Trow from the Humane Society of Canada and the Toronto Humane Society. Welcome to Queen's Park again. They have oft been in attendance here, both deputing before the committee and, of course, in attendance in the House for debate of this bill.

You will recall that prior to third reading, second reading and first reading, we in the New Democratic Party had some serious concerns with Bill 50. One of the concerns that we had was with section 6. In response to hundreds of e-mails, mostly orchestrated by the humane societies that this would affect, particularly the Toronto Humane Society, we were concerned that this particular section be removed. We didn't get what we wanted. We got something, however. I want to read the amendment that the government brought in. They added, "A corporation or other entity that was an affiliated society on April 3, 2008 may continue to use" these names, i.e. "humane society," ... even if it is no longer an affiliated society."

There are a couple of problems with that. First and foremost and, I think, somewhat to the relief of those humane societies that are living in fear of this bill passing third reading—humane societies like the Humane Society of Canada, the Mississauga Humane Society, the Burlington Humane Society—they might find some solace in the fact that I really do believe, based on legal advice, that this section is *ultra vires*. What does that mean? It means that I don't think the OSPCA or the McGuinty government of Ontario has the legal jurisdiction or right to remove the name of someone who calls themselves a humane society, whether we pass this or not. I want to let stakeholders who are concerned about this know that this really is covered by federal law. I have to admit, it's still egregious that it's here. It's certainly a slap in the face of others who are doing wonderful work with animals, who want to call themselves "humane." But based on some legal opinions that we've seen—in particular, I'm going to cite one of the deputants, the Burlington Humane Society, which sought a lawyer's advice on this. The name "humane" is descriptive, for starters. We can't force someone to call themselves humane, or inhumane, for that matter.

Despite the fact that we in the opposition couldn't get this section removed, I do commend all of those stakeholders who raised a problem with this particular section, who called for its amendment or repeal. Because of their efforts, we at least got this amendment.

Despite the amendment and despite their concerns, I would say to have some confidence, going forward, in using the name that you've traditionally used, and let them come get you, because I don't think they can. So, there's that.

Here are the concerns about the bill that were raised by some of the deputants.

First of all, oversight of the overseers: There was a general concern from many deputants about who was going to oversee the OSPCA, whom somebody could appeal to if they didn't like the ruling, etc. I'm going to deal with that.

I believe that in part I've dealt with section 6, but I'll continue.

The other aspect of this legislation which is particularly egregious, and I heard one of the members stand up and read a petition about this, is that there is a lack of private roadside zoo regulation. We remember back to the member from Willowdale, Mr. Zimmer, who brought in Bill 154 about private zoos. We remember also some assurances from the McGuinty government that they were going to bring forward legislation that was going to deal with private roadside zoos. Even CAZA is concerned about private roadside zoos.

We had an incident not too long ago of a wallaby that escaped from a private roadside zoo. We're not saying that that wallaby did not get good treatment at this private roadside zoo, but who's to know? There is not a lot of oversight—there's no oversight, in fact—and unfortunately there isn't any oversight in Bill 50 either, so that's a problem.

Now, is this going to be left to regulation? That is why I stand here today. I certainly hope that the government, when reading these transcripts, when listening to this debate, will do something in regulation to make sure that private roadside zoos get the scrutiny they need. I know that the member from Willowdale wants that. I know every deputant who came forward wants that. We in the New Democratic Party want that. So, again, let's hope that what's not in the bill comes forward somewhere in regulation.

Another concern that was often raised was about the definition of "distress"—I will deal with that—and the other one was regarding training of OSPCA agents. Certainly the general feeling out there among deputants was that that training needs to be more extensive.

I'm going to wander through this and I want to really, in this presentation, give credence to our deputants. Here we purport to practise democracy, and where we see democracy really in action at a grassroots level is when a committee like this on Bill 50 goes out into the community—perhaps not as extensively as it should have, perhaps not for as long as it could have, but it does go out and listens to people coming forward. I want to honour those who came forward and I want to say up front that we in the New Democratic Party are going to vote in favour of Bill 6. But, and this is a big "but," we have concerns. We hope that the government listens to the concerns. Even a bill that's an inch forward, a step that's

an inch forward, for animals is better than nothing, and that's the spirit in which we support Bill 50. But there are problems and there are possibilities still in regulation, so let's not say that this is over. Please, let us continue forward and look at how this bill could be strengthened for everyone concerned.

I talked about the *ultra vires* action of section 6. I'm not going to deal further on that. Suffice it to say that I don't think it would stand up in a court of law. So for those who are concerned about it, I spoke to the Mississauga Humane Society just this morning to find out and, again, they are concerned about it. I assured them, "Keep on using your name; keep on using your name." Part of the problem, of course, is that the OSPCA is the arbiter of who is or is not an affiliate. This, again, is a problem of transparency and oversight. There might be a humane society that wants to be affiliated with the OSPCA, and they decide, "No." Again, where's the route of appeal there? There are a number of problems with that section, but I don't think a problem in actuality, because I do believe it's *ultra vires*. That is to say that I don't think it will hold up in court.

Just to break it up, because I know that the tendency of talks that go on for an hour in the afternoon is to make people somewhat soporific, I'm going to break it up with some other good quotes about animals. Here's one from Winston Churchill. He said, "I like pigs. Dogs look up to us. Cats look down on us. Pigs treat us as equals." I think we can take some solace in that.

The Mississauga Humane Society came and deputed before us. I'm just going to read a little section out of the good work that they do. Again, this is one of the humane societies that would be affected were Bill 50 to have its way and section 6 to hold up. The Mississauga Humane Society takes in surrendered animals that otherwise might end up at Mississauga Animal Services and be killed. Remember, we've heard about euthanasia rates, kill rates, for some of the services. The Mississauga Humane Society doesn't kill any animals. In fact, they don't house animals; they actually find animals adoptive homes. And they save the city funds and reduce their kill rates simply because of their existence and their good work on behalf of the animals. The MHS also contributes greatly to the city of Mississauga by reducing the overpopulation of stray cats, for the same reason, that are almost everywhere in the city.

1330

A cat quote—I have a cat, so I'm particularly fond of felines: "Dogs have owners, but cats have staff." You've got to like that, George.

Hon. George Smitherman: I've got three cats.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: You've got three cats? Well, I don't know whether to be frightened by that or not, but we'll leave that be.

Moving right along, one of the concerns about transparency of the OSPCA and its conduct is, of course, the fact that they get taxpayers' money: \$6.1 million, in effect. That has been verified by ministry staff, Mr. Zimmerman, among others—\$6.1 million. Here is the prob-

lem: Who tracks that? We have heard it said by the government side that this is a private agency, but here's the problem: You can't have it both ways. You can't have a private agency that does public business, which is clearly what the OSPCA does and what is going to be done, of course, even more extensively with the passage of Bill 50, without having public oversight.

We in the New Democratic Party are particular fans of our current Ombudsman. We think André Marin is the best. We like André Marin's reports. We think he does a wonderful job. We think he's critical where he should be and he praises where it's warranted. André Marin has no oversight over the OSPCA, none whatsoever.

Even further, FOI, freedom of information act requests: We hear from the government side—in fact, it was sent to Mr. O'Sullivan of the Humane Society of Canada—that the OSPCA, their books, their bylaws, what goes on, where the money is spent, their audit reviews, are not FOI-able. One might ask, with \$6.1 million of taxpayers' money going toward this private agency, why are taxpayers not allowed to find out how the money is spent?

I was very concerned, of course, about the lack of transparency with the bylaws of the OSPCA. I asked and asked and asked, and toward the end of the deputations in our committee hearings, I finally received them. So I do have the bylaws for the OSPCA. I would certainly suggest that someone who is interested in them contact my office or keep pressing, because they're out there. But it highlights the difficulty that even a member of provincial Parliament has. If I have a difficult time finding the bylaws of a private agency that gets government taxpayer money, how much more difficult would it be for a private citizen or someone else? Again, this points to the lack of transparency. Certainly, that's a problem. It's a problem where \$6.1 million of taxpayers' dollars are being spent and where *de facto* you have police abilities given to a private agency—the right of warrantless entry, for example.

To be fair, they have always had the right of warrantless entry. I know this has come up; I know my colleagues to the right have raised this. Most people didn't know this, and now they do, I hope: The OSPCA does have the right of warrantless entry, whatever we may think of that. Personally, if there's an animal in danger, I would like to have an agent be able to access that house, that car, that pound, whatever, to look after those animals. So I don't think it's necessarily a bad thing, but again, this highlights the lack of transparency. If you have an agency with police powers, you need to have transparency. You need to have the right of appeal, in the same way that the criminal justice system gives us a right of appeal: You're innocent until proven guilty. The animal owner needs that right, that you're innocent until proven guilty.

So, again, transparency, and that's all we're asking for here. We're asking for the same rights of transparency for our citizens, and for our animals, for that matter, that humans have before their criminal justice system.

Here's a Mahatma Gandhi quote: "The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated." Well, certainly if that's the case, we have a long way to go in Canada, and we have a long way to go in Ontario.

One of the concerns that was raised repeatedly about this bill, and certainly we on the committee were all educated about, is the difference between animal welfare and animal rights. I think the general population of Ontario and the general population of this assembly would err on the side of animal welfare rather than animal rights. I just think that's where we're at as a community.

But even then, one might ask oneself about the huge exemptions in Bill 50, the huge exemptions to wildlife, to farm animals—and again we're not talking here about standard practices of farmers. We heard many deputations about that, and they are exempt from the bill. We're not even talking about—although some of us might want to go there—the standard practices and legal practices of hunters and anglers. Those too are exempt.

What we're talking about is the needless cruelty visited upon huge swaths and sorts of animals that is not covered in Bill 50. I think of the case, for example—and this gentleman is a lawyer, so perhaps that says something about lawyers—the example of the lawyer gentleman—hardly a gentleman—farmer who had 50 horses starve to death on his property. Those horses are not covered and would not be covered by Bill 50. We have to ask about the extent of a bill that wouldn't cover an egregious, horrendous act like that. Similarly, many of the deputations that came before us mentioned cases of ridiculous, sadistic cruelty to wildlife. We're not talking about normal hunting and angling practices; we're talking about sadistic practices. Again, that is not covered by this bill.

It's interesting that that's certainly not the case in other jurisdictions where animal welfare and/or animal rights bills have been passed, and I will get to it. There's certainly an interesting case in New Jersey where, despite their deeming that some farm practices are "normal," they still passed a bill outlining them as egregious, as hurtful, and certainly covered them in a piece of animal welfare legislation that was passed in New Jersey. If they can do it not far from here, south of here, then why can't we do it with Bill 50?

Here was our opportunity and, as you heard, as the minister got up and announced third reading of this bill, this has come along once in, what, 100 years almost, 90 years? Surely we don't want to wait another 90 years to have something that will protect wildlife and farm animals just a little bit better than we're doing already and what we're doing in Bill 50.

Again, I mention my colleague—it's unfortunate he's not here—the member from Willowdale, Mr. Zimmer, who brought in a bill looking at roadside zoos. I think perhaps in doing that he was atoning for his role as parliamentary assistant on that other infamous—I'll say "infamous" from the New Democratic Party point of

view—pit bull ban. I have to say that I'm really sorry that ban was held up in Superior Court this last little while, because if Mr. Zimmer and the members of the McGuinty government really were the animal lovers that they profess to be, if they were dog lovers, they'd know that violence in animals is not breed specific. Most vets will tell you that; it's not breed specific. If you've got a violent animal—it could be a springer spaniel, it could be a beagle, it could be anything—it's more likely to be a problem with the owner than a problem with the animal. So we in the New Democratic Party are sad to see that upheld, and we certainly think that maybe Mr. Zimmer was trying to atone for his actions as parliamentary assistant when bringing in Bill 154. Unfortunately, that too has gone up in smoke in this Legislature. Again, in Bill 50, too bad, no protection of roadside zoo animals either.

1340

The WSPA also came and deputed before us. They support Bill 50. They think it's a step forward—a "significant improvement," as they describe it—and that asking veterinarians to report animal abuse is certainly a good thing. But even they admit, and I'm reading from their deputation, that "unlike Mr. Zimmer's bill," the proposed legislation would not "proactively promote better treatment of animals...." So they seem to give with one hand and perhaps take away a little bit with the other—they are talking there about the regulation of roadside zoos.

We've certainly heard from others about standards of care, which are pretty universally accepted as a benchmark for animal welfare. I'm going to read them, because I think it's important that we hear them and then know whether Bill 50 really addresses them for most animals in the province of Ontario:

(1) All animals must have access to a sufficient quantity of potable water and an adequate supply of fresh, nutritive food appropriate to the species and presented in a species-appropriate manner for the maintenance of good health and to satisfy the animal's nutritional needs.

(2) That the animal be provided with adequate medical attention when the animal is sick or injured or in pain or suffering.

(3) That the animal is provided with adequate protection to minimize the risk of pain, injury, disease, fear and distress.

(4) That all animals must have access to adequate protection from the elements. Shelters must be sufficient for accommodating all animals at the same time if necessary.

(5) All animals must have access to a comfortable resting area, appropriate bedding and comfortable surfaces.

(6) Transport the animal, if it is transported, in such a way as to ensure the animal's physical safety and good welfare and not confine the animal to an enclosure, pen or area without adequate space, with unsanitary conditions, without ventilation, with inadequate light, with uncomfortable substrates and surfaces, with uncomfortable

temperatures, and together with one or more other animals that may pose a danger to the animal, or that is in a state of disrepair that is dangerous to the animal's health or well-being.

The internationally recognized five freedoms, by the way, are freedom from hunger, thirst and malnutrition; freedom from fear and distress; freedom from physical and thermal discomfort; freedom from pain, injury and disease; and freedom to express normal patterns of behaviour.

What they're asking for, because we don't see this in Bill 50, is that this be part of the regulations that are looked at and are added to Bill 50 to give it some weight; also some direction, quite frankly, to those who deputed before us who wanted to know what this bill meant when it talked about animal distress. If they added the five freedoms and the other general standards of care that the WSPA is asking for, I think we might get a little closer to that mark.

Again, I ask the government to please consider their submission when looking at the regulations. Certainly, if the animals under human care were granted these, then it would give us some jurisdictional mandate to look at roadside zoos, among other enclosed areas, among other ways of holding and treating and keeping our animals, that would stand up and would certainly be a boon to agents looking into this.

One of the interesting aspects of this—and I have to point this out, again in light of our deputants' concerns—is, where are the agents looking at the pens, the shelters run by the OSPCA, in light of these concerns? Again, one would hope, with transparency and oversight of the overseers, if you will, someone is checking their shelters and making sure the OSPCA's shelters and everyone's shelters also meet the standards of the WSPA and other animal welfare groups in light of this deputation. One hopes that is looked at.

They go on and on to recommend a number of substrates of that in terms of captive animals.

The animal alliance network and the farm sanctuary movement wrote us a letter and were concerned about some aspects of Bill 50, in light, again, of the animals left out of its purview. They mentioned the New Jersey Supreme Court and its ruling, which goes much further than Bill 50. I've mentioned that. Their concerns fall under the following three headings: animals used for research, native wildlife, and animals raised for food. They raise the concern that none of those groups is covered by Bill 50. As I say, we're erring on the side of animal welfare here, not on animal rights. Certainly, the bill does make mention of animals used for medical research. We're not against that in the New Democratic Party. We are concerned that animals used for research, animals in the wild and animals raised for food are also treated well and concerned that if we're extending warrantless entry by the OSPCA—if they're going to be looking at the welfare of animals in other areas, why not in those as well?

Burlington Humane Society, one of the humane societies that is and was affected by section 6 of this, in

terms of being able to use their name: Again, I thank them for their hard work, for their deputation. I mentioned their lawyer, a trademark law specialist, who also gave the opinion that the province did not have the authority to enact legislation in this regard, as trademarks, unlike business names, are considered federal jurisdiction—so, the *ultra vires* comment which is so important. Again, by all means, keep using the name “humane society.”

We in the New Democratic Party never saw a reason for section 6 to be in this bill. Really, it has nothing to do with animal welfare; it has to do far more with human welfare, with one charity competing against another charity for charitable dollars. It has no place in a bill respecting animal welfare.

I know that the government has raised their concerns about fraud; I heard that also from ministry staff.

By the way, kudos to ministry staff. I have to say they worked really hard on this bill. I thank them for their hard work, I thank them for the briefs that they gave me, the bylaws that they finally found for me, the work that they did for my office, on behalf of this bill.

Really, there is not a concern about fraud here. Anyone who uses “humane society” in a fraudulent way would, of course, fall under the jurisdiction of the criminal justice system. They're already covered. If somebody fraudulently tries to raise money for any kind of charity that doesn't have a charitable status number, that doesn't do what the charity purports to do, that comes ringing your doorbell and calls themselves whatever, that is already covered by federal criminal justice. So we don't need section 6 in this bill to protect people from themselves.

I really put forward that this still has more to do with one charity battling another charity than anything else and is not to do with animal welfare.

Here's another deputation which I found somewhat interesting. This is from the Southwestern Ontario Wildlife Coalition. They said something in their conclusion in their statement to us: “This proposed legislation is toothless. It is ‘feel good’ legislation, drafted to make it seem as though the OSPCA is a useful body (a point we do not concede) and that somehow the wording of this act will make the lives of animals better. In very limited circumstances, it might. But for all the large issues—those that cover the 95%-plus of Ontario's animals who are not pets or livestock—this legislation does nothing”—again, their point of view, but again, I think with some basis. However, as I said, an inch forward is better than nothing.

1350

They concede that this act confers a modest increase in authority and responsibility for the OSPCA, but it does not give them the responsibility or even the right to act on behalf of the greatest number of Ontario's animals. Their authority is limited to not much more than the family pet. So there you hear from one side of the spectrum: animal rights and animal welfare.

It's interesting to look at the bylaws that I did receive—by the way, not all of them. They're here and

certainly they will be, as I said before, in my office if anybody wants to see them. But I would suggest that anybody and everybody listening at home, anybody who is concerned about animal welfare, do read these bylaws, look at them, hold the organization that issues them to account. Even if Bill 50 doesn't give us the transparency we want, the oversight that we ask for, or the accountability that we're due, perhaps citizens can themselves hold this organization to account. We certainly would ask that.

Again, I want to make it very clear. We heard from OSPCA agents. I'm sure many of the agents who came before us have absolutely the best interests of animals in their hearts and in the application of their duties. Nobody is faulting them. People are simply asking for what is rightfully theirs, which is the oversight of a somewhat public and somewhat private agency where taxpayers' dollars are involved. That is all one is asking for.

Of course, in a sense, we want to work with those agents. We want to be able to better prepare them for what they're going out there to meet in the outside world. We want, for example, to see that their training is extended. That's not in Bill 50 either, but we certainly heard a number of deputations that seemed to imply that more training is not only desirable but necessary for agents who are acting on behalf of all Ontarians, quite frankly, where animal welfare is concerned. Certainly, I heard some assurances from the government side that that is going to be put into effect.

I hope, and inveigh upon the government, that perhaps—this is probably not even a regulatory matter—in your conversations with Hugh or the OSPCA you make sure that that promise is upheld, because we certainly would want that for the agents for their own protection, and we would want that for the animals.

Here's a deputation that was somewhat interesting. I won't give the name of the deputant in this instance, but it talked about what one has to go through in order to be an affiliate:

"In order to be approved as an affiliate, as I mentioned, we had to sign an agreement with the OSPCA, and among other items in this agreement, article 9 states: 'Shelters must be well-ventilated, have plenty of light, and be heated to 60 degrees. Outside runs and shade must be provided.' Nowhere in this agreement does it state the size the runs should be, and nowhere does it state what a cat area or a reptile area should look like. The OSPCA has many shelters under their umbrella, and we would guess that not one of them has the same standards, so how can we impose standards on zoos or exhibits unless we have them too?"—good question.

One would ask, again, for what I mentioned at the very beginning. One of the concerns was oversight of the overseers, that we make sure the shelters, the pens and the runs owned and operated by the OSPCA have some oversight as well, because, when giving them these extended benefits and extended responsibilities, we should also be extending them the onus of those responsibilities along with the rights.

I'm just looking at some of these others. In terms of the ministry staff and their briefing of me, after a few of the deputations went on—and I know that this committee travelled around the province and did a lot of excellent work in doing so and listening, and I believe we really did listen. The ministry staff gave me a briefing—not myself alone but some other members of the committee, and it was welcomed, and was extensive—in which they tried to answer some of our concerns and questions, one of them being about warrantless entry not being new. The other was about the number of complaints investigated. So I just want to read these into the record, because I know they were questions that some of our deputants had.

According to OSPCA records from 2007, 16,834 complaints were investigated; 254 charges were laid—211 Criminal Code charges and 43 provincial offence charges; 2,581 compliance orders were issued; and 5,171 animals in distress removed. It doesn't say what happened to those 5,171 animals, but it does note that they were removed. One would want to know, in the interest of transparency, the follow-up there: How many had to be euthanized, how many were euthanized, how many were adopted out etc.

There were 35 appeals of compliance or removal orders received: 17 appeals were rejected, abandoned or resolved and 18 appeals had completed hearings and decisions. That was through the Animal Care Review Board.

They answered the question, as I said, about warrantless entry not being new. They answered the question about funding: \$6.1 million. We have that from ministry staff. They also go on to say—and this, to be fair, was before the amendment was brought forward by the government—that there are only 10 known groups operating in Ontario with the name "humane society" that are not affiliated with the OSPCA. Section 6 of Bill 50, they said, again before the amendment, would also repeal section 10 of the OSPCA Act to enable over 200 animal welfare groups that are not affiliated with the OSPCA to continue operating legally. It's kind of an interesting statement. It doesn't jibe with our research but, again, I read it into the record so that people can respond and, because this is the last time they'll get to look at this bill—undoubtedly it will be passed today—so that they then deal with the regulatory body and send in their concerns, if they have concerns, about the details that I've just read.

In terms of funding, I can and will go into details with anybody who's interested. We received that from ministry staff, so thank you for that.

To continue, the International Fund for Animal Welfare also deputed—a prestigious organization, one that we listened to with interest and gave the gravity that it was due, I believe. They brought us back to the five freedoms which I mentioned: freedom from thirst and hunger, freedom from discomfort, freedom from pain, injury and disease, freedom to express normal behaviour and freedom from fear and distress. They also had con-

cerns, of course, with section 6, with the humane societies. Just about everybody did.

My concern is that the amendment did not go far enough. Unfortunately, on this side of the House, we don't have the number of members necessary to force the government's hand on something like this. We do give thanks to all of those people out there—and there were hundreds, if not thousands of them—who sent us e-mails demanding that section 6 be removed. We did what we could, but the amendment to section 6 is due to them. So I want to thank them again.

Here are some concerns: This was just from an individual, but I thought they were very salient. She said that, in her estimation, inspectors didn't have enough training or supervision. She asks: "Who hires, trains and supervises these inspectors? Some of them are volunteer agents, and they have the powers of a police officer. The OSPCA inspector who handled my case would have had two weeks' training, a high school education and a driver's licence. That's all you need to get the job. The chief inspector is hours away in Newmarket. Who supervises their daily actions?"

She raised this concern when this particular inspector came into her breeding area where there were puppies, which of course needs to be sterile: "When the OSPCA arrives, you ask them to disinfect their hands or step into a bleach bath or put on boot covers or overalls. They're always refusing, saying, 'You're the first place I've visited today.' When I pushed them to disinfect their hands before they touched my puppies, they told me that they didn't have to and touched the puppies anyway."

This could be hearsay; I'm not saying—that's a valid concern, but I'm saying that we heard enough of that so-called hearsay that one wants to reiterate the training aspect of the inspectors.

Of course, the Humane Society of Canada has raised their own concerns about the parliamentary assistant refusing to meet with them; the freedom of information act supposedly not being applicable; \$6.1 million, in effect, being spent; and the qualifications for the chief inspector. What are the qualifications? Again, something left to regulation, one hopes. But certainly one would hope that the qualifications are extensive.

1400

Perhaps what was most telling was when we heard from the veterinarians themselves. I'm not saving the best for last, but I'm saving it.

The Ontario Veterinary Medical Association submission to the Standing Committee on Social Justice re Bill 50. They had some interesting things to say:

"(A) Bill 50 should be expanded to include government oversight and public accountability of the OSPCA. With the OSPCA being given greater responsibilities and further enforcing authority, it would be prudent to have the Ontario government have direct oversight of the organization, providing accountability to the general public. This would include implementing an obligation for the OSPCA to provide regular reports to the government.

"That being said, we should also encourage the government to provide ongoing funding." It is providing funding, but ongoing funding. Along with the funding, they go on to recommend that the oversight be there.

"(B) The Animal Care Review Board: In addition to the OSPCA, we recommend that the government have full oversight of the Animal Care Review Board. The board should be required to report regularly to the government and make their decisions available to the general public. It is also recommended that Animal Care Review Board members be adequately compensated for their time on the board. This will assist in attracting and retaining qualified experts capable of successfully fulfilling the board's mandate." It goes on.

"(E) Veterinarians: Bill 50 requires veterinarians to report all suspected cases of animal abuse. Although this adds to veterinarians' responsibilities and obligations, not only do we welcome it, we have been advocating for this change for many years. This obligation will make a significant difference in helping to reduce animal abuse in Ontario. Providing veterinarians with protection from liability when reporting suspected cases of animal abuse in good faith will allow veterinarians to report with more ease and confidence. We strongly encourage that this provision be kept in Bill 50." That's a good point, because if you want them to report animal abuse, and then someone turns around and goes after them in civil court, there should be some liability option there.

Again, I say all these things in full knowledge that Bill 50 will pass. I say this again to the government in full hopes that the government will take these as useful, helpful suggestions; that they will bring them into regulation; that they will listen to the vast majority of deputants who ask repeatedly for some clear themes—not going to be included in Bill 50, I'm afraid, folks, but certainly to be included in the regulation.

Just to rehash, first of all, that there's some oversight of OSPCA, of its operations; that there's some oversight of the Animal Care Review Board; that there's some oversight of the chief inspector; that there's some oversight of the way \$6.1 million of taxpayers' dollars are spent; that there's some reporting mechanism. Certainly, we think that the goings-on of the OSPCA, being a recipient of taxpayers' dollars to that degree, should be at FOIable, if not under the mandate of the Ombudsman. Either/or would certainly help to solve the problem, but certainly a reporting mechanism. This is only sensible. Any accountant would tell you the same thing.

Section 6: It's amended. Thank you, at least for small mercies. At least it helps some who call themselves humane societies, but it still has that egregious aspect to it that there are many humane societies—I would suggest more than 10—who will be covered by section 6, and who will not be exempt by section 6, even as amended.

Now, as I said, my advice to them, having talked to lawyers, is that they continue to use their name until somebody comes after them. Then maybe we can raise the question in the House if they do, because as far as I'm concerned, it's ultra vires: It's not their jurisdiction; it's

not our jurisdiction in the province of Ontario; it is under federal jurisdiction. So there's that.

Next, the lack of private zoo regulations: Poor Mr. Zimmer, completely ignored by his government that promised to do something about regulating private zoos. It's kind of sad. Actually, I was preaching up in his riding yesterday, up at Newtonbrook United Church on their 168th anniversary. It's a wonderful riding. They're happy to support animal welfare in the riding of Willowdale. Wouldn't they all be very saddened to know that what was the genesis of a good idea has been lost in Bill 50? Not only private zoos, not only Wally, but also all of those animals raised for food, all of those native and wildlife species, all of those used in medical research. Again, nobody is asking that those activities not be exempt in some way, shape or form, but surely we can ask that there be some kind of oversight of the welfare of the animals under their care, and perhaps standard practice is just not good enough in the 21st century. Certainly that's what we heard from the deputants. That goes to speak to the broad-based problematic exemptions of Bill 50.

Finally, the training of the agents who have been given the powers of warrantless entry, among other aspects of their jobs, who are working really for a private agency—sort of; sort of now a public agency. They should be given the training they need. One would hope that that's more than a couple of days, more than two weeks; that they really know what they are doing before they walk into that breeding area, before they walk into that zoo; that they have someone along with them. We've heard assurances of that from the OSPCA. Good, let's see those assurances lived out, again, hopefully, in regulation.

Certainly I would say, just to wrap up, that there is no cause ever for ignoring the voices of those who do not ignore the voices of animals and those who care for them. "Why, oh why?" we might ask. For example, the Humane Society of Canada, the Burlington Humane Society, the Mississauga Humane Society, to name only three bodies, why have they been shut out of the regulation process, of the process of the writing of the bill? I mean, really, all we're asking for, again, is transparency and what one should always ask from one's elected representatives: that they respond to those who elected them. I can tell you that across our ridings, across Ontario, we heard deputations that carried those same themes in them. Those deputants want to be heard and they want to know that their government is reacting and acting in their best interests and the interests of the animals they look after.

Not one of the deputations came forward without some recommendation now to be looked after in regulation, including—and maybe I should finish with the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies, which also came forward and asked about the fact that Ontario residents are still free to keep tigers, monkeys, cougars or pythons as pets.

You know, it has been a long process to get us to this point. We've travelled the width and breadth of Ontario,

we've listened to deputations from individuals and organizations. Everyone here, and I speak in a completely non-partisan way, I believe, wants the best for animals. There's no question about that. I think what has happened here is that we have a government that finds there's an organization that kind of came ready-made, that was willing to do the work of government for less money than it would take the government to do it. I understand that. I understand that in tight fiscal times you look around to find ways to look after those under your care, including animals, and you try to do that with the least spent of taxpayers' dollars. Here you have an organization, the OSPCA, which does the work. They're doing the work of government even though they're a private agency. They're doing the work of government and getting taxpayers' money to do it.

1410

The only thing that we ask, then, since the government has found this organization ready-made to do their work for them, is that they at least do the due diligence that's required in looking after that agency, in making sure the t's are crossed and the i's are dotted; in making sure the \$6.1 million is well spent; in making sure the agents are well trained; in making sure that there aren't such broad-based exemptions to the bill; in making sure that it's not just about pets, that it's also about exotics and zoo animals; in making sure that it also covers those animals that are exempted by definition, even if to do so means to do it in regulation, and that it's still not okay for that gentleman farmer to starve 50 horses to death with Bill 50 passed. We're looking for better legislation to protect our animals.

Finally, thank you to all the deputants. Thank you to all of those who came forward. Thank you to Tim Trow of the Toronto Humane Society. Thank you to Michael O'Sullivan of the Humane Society of Canada. Thank you for all your hard work.

Thank you for all the hundreds of e-mails we received from people who are in support of the general gist of Bill 50 but who would like to see it strengthened, who would like to see far more in regulations than is there. Thank you to all the legislators who sat on the committee and thank you to ministry staff who made it possible.

Really, let's hope, finally, that there is a thank you that we can hear in some bare whisper, in a language we don't quite understand as humans, from the animals themselves.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath):
Questions and comments?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I appreciate the opportunity to speak on Bill 50.

The member spoke about a lot of the concern regarding the humane societies. I can remember a time, for those who are unfamiliar with it, about 20-odd years ago, when the Toronto Humane Society disallowed anybody to adopt a pet if the individual worked in a grocery store with a meat department. I think some of the concerns would be about the extent to which the regulations would have an impact on individuals or societies throughout the province of Ontario.

The member also spoke about zoos and roadside zoos. I know WSPA has provided individuals with a definition of a roadside zoo, but those individuals around the room have to think, what is the roadside zoo in their community? Is it the one in Peterborough, the Riverview zoo? Or is it the Cat World, or the Bowmanville Zoo, which is the oldest private zoo in Canada? What is the standard for those zoos, and whose standard are they going to use?

For roadside zoos and the standards that are being brought forward, the concern that would be brought forward that the member was speaking about—and I am making comments on the member's comments—is that there would only effectively be two zoos in the province of Ontario, which would be the Metro Toronto Zoo as well as possibly the African Lion Safari, with some moderate changes.

When you speak about the proper care and control of animals, it's establishing a standard by which it's being left to regulation that causes them concern. For those who are unaware, the average boar bear, which is a male bear, has a normal range of about 90 square kilometres. How are you going to fit that into an area which individuals would say is an acceptable area, an acceptable domain?

I don't think anybody in this room—nor do I know anybody here nor do I know anybody who wants to see animals mistreated. We want to ensure that those animals are properly protected in our community, and we would do anything that would be—but there is some strong concern about the impact of the regulations and how they're going to be enforced.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Dave Levac: I want to thank the member from Parkdale–High Park for her extensive comments on the bill, her being there and witnessing it; I believe she's the critic for the NDP. I know you've got a large portfolio and it's very difficult, but you were there for the entire time, so thank you for your input.

Yes, we did arrange for the briefings and ensured that staff worked with you diligently and co-operatively. And yes, I did ask them to give you all the details, because that was a commitment that I had made, that I would provide that data that was asked for, and they were very good in providing that. I too extend my thanks to the staff for their hard work.

Just a couple of quick comments about the some of the points that you made: First of all, some of the measures that we've been taking to prevent cruelty include increasing the annual funding of the Ontario OSPCA to \$500,000 to support agent and inspector training; the one-time funding on top of that of another \$100,000 to support training to begin the zoo inspection plan, in co-operation with MNR and CAZA. There have been some ongoing talks with MNR and CAZA to ensure that that \$100,000 is used specifically to train in what they're looking at and what they're doing to ensure that when they look, for the first time in some cases but also at

other times, they know exactly what they are inspecting, so they can establish whether or not they're being treated as best as they possibly should. Those are a couple of ideas I want to make sure you're aware of, and are indeed already started.

There's a one-time capital grant of \$5 million to the OSPCA for the fiscal year of 2007-08 to improve and modernize their infrastructure. A lot of ridings have already announced that some of that money has been made available to those centres and shelters to take care of some of the concerns you've raised about the present condition of some OSPCA shelters. Some of them have been able to do great fundraising to keep these updated, but others need that help, and that's that one-time \$5-million capital grant.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

The member for Parkdale–High Park for a response.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you to the members from Brant and Oshawa for their comments. Thank you particularly to the member from Brant for that clarification. Again, it's not so much the money; it's the oversight of it. As you suggested, we want to make sure that the \$500,000 and the \$100,000 grant are spent in the way that is intended, and that the one-time grant of \$5 million is spent in the way it is intended. This speaks to the transparency of the organization itself.

It will be interesting to see that transparency in an on-going way. We understand it's a private charity. If there are other grants after this one-time grant is made, there should equally be a reporting mechanism on the way they're spent—any taxpayers' dollars. I was pleased to hear that, and I look forward to receiving those reports as they come in. If you could keep us updated, I would appreciate that, and also being kept updated on any bylaws that happen.

Of course, I would ask all our stakeholders to report back to me, if they could, on section 6 and if anybody tries to invoke it. I'm most interested in that because, again, I don't believe it's sustainable.

At the end of the day, this is a step forward. It's a step forward that has taken 90 years, but let's hope it's not the last step. Let's hope that this is the beginning of a new way of looking at animal welfare in the province of Ontario, that this is the beginning, not the end, in a sense of Bill 50 even; that in regulations we look at tightening it up, extending its jurisdiction and making it stronger so that more animals are covered by it than, as you heard the comment, just the family pet.

With that, I'm delighted to have been part of this journey. It has allowed me to meet all sorts of amazing people, and particularly to tour the Toronto Humane Society, which I highly advise everybody to do and adopt an animal while you're there.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm pleased to rise and offer some comments on Bill 50. Particularly, I want to focus on some issues of concern brought forward by constituents

in the riding of Niagara West—Glanbrook who have met with me or e-mailed me.

I also want to note that I think a lot of impetus for this bill actually came from some efforts of members of the Ontario PC caucus that had pushed similar concerns about strengthening our animal protection legislation in the province of Ontario.

You may remember that in December 2007, Bob Runciman, the leader of the official opposition in the Legislature, brought forward Bill 23, An Act to amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. This proposed, among other things, extending to all animals of a domestic nature the standards of care afforded to dogs and cats bred for sale. I think that a lot of what Mr. Runciman suggested may have helped to inform the minister's decision in bringing forward this bill.

I also want to give a lot of credit to my colleague from York—Simcoe, Julia Munro, who has been a long-time and powerful advocate for animal protection legislation that accurately reflects the state of affairs in the province of Ontario today. Ms. Munro comes from a lot of experience in this vein. In fact, you may remember that An Act to amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 2001, was an initiative from Ms. Munro's work at the time. That bill proposed to create standards of care for puppy and kitten mills, and proposed ownership bans and potential lifetime ownership bans as penalties. The act became a model piece of legislation for other jurisdictions. I do want to commend my colleague Ms. Munro for her groundbreaking efforts in 2001 and my colleague Mr. Runciman for his work in 2007, as a forerunner to this bill.

1420

Our colleague from Simcoe North, Mr. Dunlop, has been our critic on this. He has been through the committee hearings and brought forward a lot of sensible advice on how to improve the bill, some of which was heard and some of which was not. I do want to thank Garfield for circling some of the shortcomings of the bill in its initial form.

By way of example, one of the issues we on the PC benches brought forward is that the bill allows the OSPCA inspectors a right of warrantless entry. We've certainly seen an expansion of this power under the McGuinty government, under a number of acts, and we do want to raise the ongoing concern about the degree to which the government has been giving rights of entry on to private property, into buildings, without warrant. It has been expanded significantly under the McGuinty government. Obviously, warrantless entry would be something that you want to give only in the most extreme circumstances, not something that should be broad-based across government agencies and ministries.

We also raised a concern that the bill did not contain provisions to ensure sufficient training and oversight, in light of the powers that have been provided to the OSPCA inspectors under Bill 50. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture, among other stakeholders, particularly

those in rural Ontario, has noted that Bill 50 had the potential to threaten the existing standards of care, especially for agricultural workers.

Furthermore, one of the concerns brought forward by the Ontario PC caucus was that Bill 50 did not specifically address standards of care in zoos, which has been an item of debate in at least one if not more private members' bills in the Ontario Legislative Assembly.

As was referenced by my colleague from Parkdale—High Park, this bill called for animal welfare groups not under the OSPCA to cease using the name "humane society"—section 6—which has been an important part of debate here in the Legislature and in committee.

I want to commend my colleague from Simcoe North, Garfield Dunlop, for bringing those issues to the floor and for pressing them for some changes. The changes did not go as far as we had hoped in many of those areas, but we do feel that we were able to represent the voice of many Ontarians in rural and urban Ontario who had expressed concerns about those specific provisions.

Let me get into a bit of detail.

Warrantless entry—sections 11.4 and 12 of the bill—would permit OSPCA inspectors or agents to enter buildings where animals are with or without a warrant. Nowhere in the act, in giving this significant authority to inspectors, is consideration given to the implications this may have on the animals and therefore, by extension, on the farmer or landowner or caregiver to those particular animals. For example, in their submission to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture said the following: "Many livestock and poultry operations employ biosecurity measures and protocols to maintain herd health. Human contact with the animals is controlled to achieve animal health. On a farm, even those individuals who have direct contact with the animals shower and change clothes before entering the barns and again before leaving. These measures serve to minimize possible disease transfer. Likewise, farmers do not enter the barns of neighbours, again to avoid possible disease transfers."

Certainly, representing a significant agricultural portion of the Niagara peninsula and into the Glanbrook and upper Stoney Creek areas, this is a concern shared by many farmers, neighbours and landowners in the rural areas.

I've had the opportunity to visit poultry and livestock operations in the past, and I know the very strict precautions that farmers take to ensure that those barns are not contaminated in any way, which often runs against what many people who have not visited these places may think—extraordinary measures to maintain our food supply at the highest standard of care.

I received a number of e-mails from residents in my riding that I will speak to, a few examples, later on. One in particular, Diana Shore from St. Anns—not too far from where my home is, in Wellandport—raised the warrantless entry issue quite vociferously in her e-mail.

Another active citizen from Caistor Centre, Walter Zimmerman, has felt so strongly about animal protection,

and has gone through an experience where he was trying to act to protect cats which were endangered by a neglectful owner, only to find that his encounter with the humane society seemed to target him more than the owner he had seen throw cats from a truck while in motion. I'll get to Mr. Zimmerman's concerns and recommendations momentarily.

Here's the concern: Nothing in sections 11, 4 and 12 of the bill even acknowledges on-farm biosecurity protocols. Nothing, for example, mandates SPCA inspectors or agents to be trained in on-farm biosecurity protocols. Again, that's from the OFA recommendation. So hopefully the minister will take that into consideration. No doubt, the Minister of Agriculture will lobby on the OFA's behalf to include biosecurity training for SPCA inspectors who may be going into these environments. It seems that, if livestock is contaminated, if a farmer's income is so affected or the food supply endangered in any way, compensation to farmers for financial losses due to an inspector's failure to follow biosecurity protocols is far more than reasonable.

Again, on behalf of many of my constituents in Niagara West—Glanbrook, there is a concern that if individuals were simply granted, through Bill 50, powers equivalent to a police officer's, at the very least, measures must be taken to ensure accountability, transparency and regular training of that individual and the organization which provides its oversight. As I mentioned, my constituents have highlighted this section of the act.

Section 6, as well, attracted a lot of attention during debate and from my constituents who follow this bill quite closely. There is significant controversy around excising section 6 from the bill entirely. Section 6 effectively removes the right of an organization, except the OSPCA or its affiliate, to include the words "humane society" in its name. Certainly, these terms are synonymous with the hard-working and caring individuals who work on behalf of animal welfare in our communities. Many of the agencies simply have not affiliated with the OSPCA and found section 6 of the bill to be well beyond the pale, and ask for it to be removed from the legislation in its entirety. The Toronto Humane Society, for example—recognizable by its name for 121 years—is one that raised that concern. A constituent of mine, Kalee McTaggart, has brought this forward; I'll read that to you momentarily. The concern was the bill would prohibit that altogether.

Because of the pressures brought forward by various interested parties, by both the official opposition and the third party, there was an amendment to the act to prevent only future organizations from using the name "humane society." We're still—at least, I am—not satisfied with that change. It's an improvement from those that currently exist, but as much as we rejected this restriction for existing organizations, we similarly reject it for any potential future organizations. I guess we will see if this section of the act is actually enforced. My colleague from Parkdale has expressed her concern about whether this is even enforceable, whether it's ultra vires in the first

place. I guess that remains to be seen. We had hoped they would listen to the amendments my colleague Mr. Dunlop had brought forward. Sadly, they have not. We'll see if this half measure is appropriate.

1430

Mr. Dave Levac: Some were.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Some were accepted. I think I said that earlier, my colleague from Brantford, to be fair. Yes, some of the amendments were accepted, which we do appreciate. There have been improvements made to the bill. There are some areas where we still express our concerns, as do my constituents.

Mr. Dave Levac: I only want to be fair.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I always try to be fair, I say to my friend, and I did note that early on.

Mr. Dunlop, on behalf of the PC caucus, had brought forward an amendment to repeal section 6 altogether. That was not accepted by the government members. They did bring forward a half measure. It does protect existing organizations; we'll see how it treats future organizations.

Kalee McTaggart of Grimsby had the following to say about section 6 in her e-mail to me dated May 5, 2008:

"Mr. Hudak:

"I am writing to you with regards to Bill 50, and requesting that section 6 be removed. I am an avid supporter of animal rights and I think that removing support to the local humane societies would be a huge mistake. Places like the humane society give second chances to animals that have been abused, neglected or that need immediate treatment. The humane society also refuses to euthanize animals unless they are seriously ill or are un-adoptable.

"Please support local humane societies and the animal welfare movement in Ontario by removing section 6 from Bill 50 before the damage is done.

"Sincerely

"Kalee McTaggart

"Grimsby resident."

I thank Kalee for taking the time to send me that personal message. I would be interested to see if Ms. McTaggart is satisfied with the amendment to section 6. I do feel that we made every effort in the Ontario PC caucus to support the call we heard from Ms. McTaggart and other constituents.

I mentioned Diana Shore of St. Anns, as well. I know that Madam Speaker, coming from the Hamilton area, is probably aware of St. Anns, which is close to my own home in Wellandport, a significant agricultural community with a proud history. Ms. Shore's e-mail is dated November 13, 2008, so just a few days ago. I had mentioned the enhanced powers of inspection—section 11—for the bill and such. She said: "As a landowner and caregiver of farm animals I am fearful of these representatives of this 'charity' organization who will have more rights than our police force. This Bill 50 has stripped me and my neighbours of our personal sense of security ... which was granted to us as Canadians under the Charter of Rights. These OSPCA officers have no background

checks and the majority have no idea or experience regarding animal breeds, care requirements nor veterinary medical training. Experiences in Ontario with the OSPCA in the last few years appear like 'money grabs,' a way for the OSPCA to extort money from their victims."

This is very strong language from my constituent Ms. Shore from St. Anns, but I think it reflects the concern in rural Ontario about the expanded powers of warrantless search and the lack of training that some OSPCA officials may have when it comes to agricultural operations.

She mentions further in her e-mail, "Let's face facts; yes, there are puppy mills hiding in our province"—and I mentioned earlier, as an aside, the outstanding work of my colleague from York-Simcoe who brought forward the bill to shut down puppy mills back in 2001—"and there are animal abuses that should be stopped. Reality is that less than 0.01% of animal owners and caretakers in Ontario fall into this group—the rest are innocent tax-paying Canadian citizens. We the Ontario citizens/voters already have several documented cases of the OSPCA wrongfully seizing animals and never laying any charges."

She goes on in her e-mail to talk particularly about the horse sector: "As a horse owner, these cases of wrongful seizures resulting in the loss of healthy and registered horses are increasing ... and Bill 50 hasn't even passed yet. We fear these incidences will continue to increase as Bill 50 will further empower the OSPCA."

She makes a series of recommendations at the end of her e-mail. Most notably, I want to highlight the first action she asks of the government: "Stop Bill 50 from passing until amendments for accountability are established and remove all actions that strip us of our basic security as stated in the Canadian Charter of Rights (i.e. warrantless entry)."

I do want to say to Ms. Shore, to other constituents in my community and those who are involved or are close to the agriculture sector, that we made every effort to improve Bill 50 to ensure that the legitimate concerns of farmers are taken into serious consideration with amendments to improve the bill. As I said, some amendments were accepted, and sadly, some very important amendments were voted down by the Liberal members of the committee that oversaw Bill 50.

I also want to mention, in the time I have remaining, a very active citizen who has taken the time to come in to see me, twice in the last number of months alone, on the issue of animal welfare: Walter Zimmerman from Caistor Centre. Walter Zimmerman, folks may know—my friend from Welland, Mr. Kormos, may have seen Little Wolf Apiaries products around. Walter spends a good portion of his summer at farmers' markets selling his delicious honey. I'll recommend it, for fans of honey here in the Ontario Legislature; Walter has one outstanding product.

Walter is one of those citizens who wants to get involved to improve his community. He recently appeared, by the way, at the Smithville council on an unrelated matter—just to show that he is somebody who has a broad range of interests, not only in agriculture; he was

calling for some greater controls on ATVs and snowmobiles that had gone on private property that had upset many local residents and seniors and damaged farmers' crops. So it's consistent for Mr. Zimmerman to show his concern about the welfare of animals.

Not too long ago, Walter and his wife were driving along a local highway and they saw an individual toss two cats from his pickup truck. Mr. Zimmerman, bless his heart, stopped, took care of the two cats—he wanted to ensure that they were okay—and called the police and the OSPCA in to help investigate and to ensure that justice was done to the individual who had callously tossed cats, might I note for the record, from a pickup truck while the truck was driving down the highway. Sadly, Mr. Zimmerman's encounter with the SPCA was far from satisfactory. To quote him, from his meeting in my office, he is concerned about the expansion of the policing powers of the SPCA, saying they throw their muscle around too much. He thinks the SPCA should respond, but use police for more of the investigations in things like the warrantless entry.

Mr. Zimmerman has also called for some sort of arm's-length review board as an appeal mechanism for OSPCA matters, and that some kind of government lawyer or crown prosecutor should be used in these cases so individual taxpayers like himself are not on the hook if they find themselves on the bad end of an experience, as Mr. Zimmerman did when he was trying to act in the best interests of these two cats. So he will be pleased with some of the amendments that the PC caucus advanced that were accepted. He will be disappointed, I think, largely in those that were not accepted. He would like to see this bill reopened sometime down the road to make the changes that he does suggest.

I thank Mr. Zimmerman, Ms. Shore, Kalee McTaggart and others for their interventions on this matter. I'm pleased to bring their voices here to the Ontario Legislature as we debate Bill 50.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Kormos: I was pleased to be able to be here during the comments made by the member for Niagara West—Glanbrook. I note especially his concern on behalf of farmers down in Niagara region and, I trust, across the province who are of the view that they haven't been adequately listened to in the course of the development of this bill. I'm going to have a chance to speak to this bill for 20 minutes in just a few minutes' time. There are some things that I want to put on the record—very much so.

I was really, really disappointed in the rather inadequate, indeed inelegant, response to the concerns about section 6 and its impact, among others, on the Toronto Humane Society. It was something that could have been addressed far more clearly, far more thoroughly, to resolve any donor concern and to avoid what could well be some litigious efforts. The only people who really win are the lawyers, at the end of the day, for all intents and purposes.

1440

I was also saddened by how the Premier's office abandoned David Zimmer, the government member for Willowdale, because you will recall that it was David Zimmer who, just before the last provincial election, introduced a private member's bill here in this chamber that was designed to regulate private zoos—roadside zoos. I'm going to have some things to say about that, because let me tell you, you go to places like—what is that, Marineland, down in Niagara Falls? A sad, dusty, shabby place, and you find private zoos that need regulation and inspection and improved standards.

I'm going to have 20 minutes to talk about those things and a few others in just a few minutes' time. I will be pleased to do that if the Speaker will accommodate me.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Dave Levac: I thank the member for his presentation to us and his reference to the members from his caucus who have been identified as champions of animal welfare. I want to remind him, and I'm sure, in terms of him telling me that he always wants to be fair and balanced, that he would not forget the fact that the member from Eglinton—Lawrence, Mr. Mike Colle, was an extremely large champion. When in opposition, he introduced a private member's bill that seemed to be saying to the government of the day, "This is something we should be doing," and received very large support from the people of Ontario. I believe it was 200,000 signatures on cards that basically said it's time for us to move forward on a 90-year-old bill. I'm sure he would not want to miss that opportunity to give him credit and, according to our friend from Welland, making sure that Mr. Zimmer gets mentioned in his championship of roadside zoo issues.

A couple of other members in the past, I understand, Mr. Runciman, and I believe there were others—I could go back in history—basically championed animal welfare. So I wanted to make sure that Mike Colle got a little bit of a dessert on the work that he did, that actually ended up being somewhat mirrored by the bill that was accepted by the government of the day, except I think they exempted breeders, if I'm not mistaken. The government of the day exempted breeders from the strength of the legislation. I'm sure that as we move forward and continue to work toward animal welfare, we would do our best to absolutely ensure that it is entrenched wherever we can.

Let me quickly talk about warrantless entry. I think everybody here knows that there still exists an opportunity to do warrantless entry, with the permission of the owner. If the owner gives permission, the inspector can go in and inspect without a warrant. That's clear, because it's not something new; it's something that existed. The other part is that, in this legislation, you can't do it in a residence. Unbeknownst to some people, who think it is warrantless any other time, it's not—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Thank you. Questions and comments?

The member for Niagara West—Glanbrook for a response.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I thank my colleagues from the Welland riding and from the Brant riding for their comments on my remarks and mentioning the work of Mr. Colle and Mr. Zimmer in this field as well.

I am pleased that I had the chance to bring forward just some of the e-mails or conversations I've had with constituents in Niagara West—Glanbrook who wanted to see this bill improved. Certainly, my experience with our local humane societies and the OSPCA, as an MPP, has been largely a positive one. In fact, my folks' dog, Gator, was a resident from the humane society in Niagara. Poor Gator now has passed away but was a great dog for the 12 or so years that Gator was with us. Gator, of course, was named after the Lakeshore Gators. My father was the principal of Lakeshore, a high-quality school in Port Colborne, an excellent school with some fantastic football teams and basketball teams, among others that I know—

Mr. Peter Kormos: But Gator's gone.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Well, the Gator has now passed away—

Mr. Peter Kormos: That's sad.

Mr. Tim Hudak:—but is hopefully watching over the Lakeshore Gators as they contend for another championship in the time ahead, as an unofficial mascot for the team.

No matter how strong the work is of local boards and organizations, we do have to make sure that the work of inspectors is within balance and is respectful of the unique concerns of the agriculture community, and needs to give due respect to the long histories of humane societies in our province that may not be directly affiliated with the OSPCA. I'm pleased that, through debate in the Legislature and the hard work of my colleagues, most notably the critic, some improvements were made to the bill, and we'll look to see how Bill 50 is in implementation.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos: New Democrats are going to support the legislation. We share some of the concerns that have been articulately expressed about its impact on the agricultural community and the potential for misapplication in the agricultural community, which is under a whole lot of pressure, as you well know, you having been travelling the province as a leadership candidate for the Ontario New Democratic Party, talking with people in agriculture, with people living in rural Ontario and with farmers.

Just yesterday I read a wonderful article—I recommend it to folks—in the Toronto Sun by Antonella Artuso. She did a rather lengthy article about the Toronto Zoo. I get back to Mr. Zimmer's initial efforts—David Zimmer, from Willowdale—to have a regulatory regime for private zoos. Do you recall the incredible support he received for that proposition, not just from within his riding and in the province—because we got those e-mails and letters too—but from across North America? While

it's true that this legislation is applicable to the animals in private zoos, this legislation is not, in and of itself, a regulatory regime for private zoos.

Let me talk about zoos in general, because that's why I made reference to the Artuso article—very well done. It was an entertaining read and a very informative one. It focuses on the Toronto Zoo, owned by the city of Toronto, and the notorious junketing done by the Giorgio Mammolitis of Toronto city council. This guy has travelled the world, Lord knows how many times over, in the pursuit of zoo information, I presume. But the Toronto Sun has blown the whistle on the Toronto Zoo board and their perks, their self-enriching perks at the expense of the zoo. I had been to the Toronto Zoo, and every time I've got somebody visiting here from outside the province or outside southern Ontario, a trip to the Toronto Zoo is mandatory. If you think summertime is fun at the Toronto Zoo, wintertime can be as wonderful, if not a little more challenging, because it creates a totally different climate there, or a totally different landscape.

I grew up down in Welland—Crowland, really. As a matter of fact, I was just at the Ukrainian Labour Temple, on Ontario Road, for the 90th anniversary of the Association of United Ukrainian Canadians on Sunday—the Ukrainian Labour Temple, that remarkable accommodation of the progressive thinkers. It's where people who formed the United Electrical Workers down in Welland would meet, and the Ukrainian Canadian community, along with other Eastern Europeans and Anglos, would have this hall as a focal point for progressive organization. I have been going there for a long, long time, not only for the food, but for some of the earliest political speeches, as not quite a teenager yet, that I heard at the Ukrainian Labour Temple. I don't have to tell you that they were enlightened and progressive ones. There was no advocacy for unfettered capitalism in the Ukrainian Labour Temple. If there was any mention of it, it was in absolute condemnation. These are people who sought and fought to build a better world. So I was there, in Crowland, and that's where I come from.

1450

The reason I mention that is because when we were kids, of course, the Buffalo Zoo was the zoo destination for people who lived in southern Ontario. While we were fascinated with it as kids—and I'm talking about back in the 1950s—even recalling that zoo is shocking because it was your classic concrete and iron bar cages with sad, lonely lions pacing back and forth with the obvious symptoms of lion dementia.

I made reference a little while ago to places like Marineland in Niagara Falls. Have you ever been there? I've never been. All I've had were some complaints from people who have been, who describe it as a sad, seedy, dusty place. I don't understand what the fascination is with somehow thinking that a captive whale—have you ever been out to the east coast and seen whales out there off the Gaspé, off Percé Rock? You're not up close. Sometimes you're closer than you would ever think you'd be. I don't know, I just think it is a far more

exciting experience to see humpbacks and killer whales as they dive and arc.

It strikes me as strange that there are some people who would somehow find it entertaining and who would actually believe that the whale is happy. The entertainment element of it is almost perverse—you know, the effort to impress people with: "Look, the whale is smiling." Whales don't smile. It's stupid. And whales don't enjoy performing. They're conditioned. They're trained to do it in classic Pavlovian style with the promise of food. Whales are not domestic animals. Of course, a few others here grew up in the 1950s, and we were indoctrinated with the Disneyfication of wild animals, the Flipper syndrome; remember? Before Flipper, it was Rin Tin Tin. Who was the collie? Lassie. "Go call 911, Lassie." This Disneyfication of animals and wildlife in general was very unhealthy. It was a very unhealthy indoctrination of my generation and of subsequent generations.

What I'm saying is, I increasingly question even the validity or legitimacy of the entertainment zoo. There's been serious criticism—Toronto Zoo is one of the finest in the world; make no mistake about it—criticism, for instance, of the elephant enclosure, and if you've been there, you understand the criticism. Smaller animals that have more square footage per size of animal are a little bit better off. They can do what most animals do, especially nocturnal animals: They can hide. Now, that frustrates the audience; right? You've got kids screaming at their parents, "Where are the lemurs?" But I'd question whether in the year 2008 there should even be such a thing as an entertainment zoo, that like other zoos, the Toronto Zoo—annual multi-, multi-, multimillion-dollar budget. When the natural habitat for so much of this wildlife is being consumed at a voracious rate, maybe, just maybe, we as a community should be making bigger investments in preserving the habitat of wildlife where that wildlife is under attack. The deforestation of South America, amongst others, is an assault on some of the world's most beautiful and dramatic creatures, and I suspect we have an interest in helping them survive in a hostile environment. So maybe zoos, if and when they do exist, should have a focus or a purpose rather than being displays, because let's face it, in this world of high-definition, widescreen television, PBS and other broadcasters have brought us closer to any number of these magnificent or fascinating or even strange creatures than we could ever dare to see them, even in an enclosure.

It reminds me—have you ever been to Coney Island? It's fascinating. Mermaid Avenue at Coney Island—I think it is 20 years since I've been there. Coney Island is like walking into a time warp. One of the fascinating things about Coney Island was the wax museum. I realized, as I was walking around the wax museum at Coney Island, that this was the creation of a phenomenon for people that predated television, and indeed even popular and constantly displayed movies. This was an opportunity for people who couldn't see television, and who perhaps had the most modest of newsreels from time

to time, to look at historical characters, and of course the inevitable obsession with criminals and the bloodiest and most vile of crimes. Surely most of the zoo phenomenon is very much the same thing.

Maybe the only zoos that should exist are zoos that are dedicated to a particular purpose: dedicated to doing research, dedicated to reviving a species that is at risk, perhaps with the goal of stocking its natural habitat with that species. Maybe our public monies would be better spent in that way. That's not to say we won't have places or shouldn't have places where people can come and see this happening. But rather than entertainment, it should be educational.

I give Antonella Artuso great credit for having focused on some of these very issues in her article in yesterday's Toronto Sun. For the life of me, I don't understand why we need private zoos at all; I just don't. There's a reference to the old Riverdale Zoo in the Artuso article. Again, that was a zoo built and designed on traditional and now very obsolete models and approaches. One of the most fascinating things about the Riverdale Zoo—do you remember the Riverdale Zoo? Yes, you do, east of Parliament Street. First of all, it's in a beautiful part of town; it really is.

When the Riverdale Zoo was transformed—they shipped out all of the exotic animals, if you will, when the Toronto Zoo was built—what they kept was a little farm with farm animals which, unlike lions and zebras and elephants and tigers, are far more amenable to being in smaller enclosures and grazing, and far more amenable to contact with humans. That experience, especially for kids in Toronto, was as exciting and delightful an animal experience as you could ever find, because here are kids starting to understand a different part of Canada and Canadian culture; that is, the agricultural part of Canada and Canadian culture, and the rural part of Canada and rural culture.

Having said that, I know some people who specialize, for instance, in things like reptiles or snakes—two examples—who do a great deal of work and breeding in an effort to ensure the survival of these species and do it on a private basis, simply out of their passion for those animals.

I regret—I really regret—that Zimmer's bill was abandoned by the McGuinty government.

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I have no qualms about saying that this piece of legislation will give animal inspection personnel the authority and powers that they need. But, look, all the legislation in the world means squat if those various humane societies, SPCAs, don't have the resources to do their job. Pass all the bills you want. I don't know what it's like in Hamilton, but down where I come from, in Welland, we've got a pretty cash-strapped municipality. Our SPCA down there that does the animal protection and deals with animals and public safety is pretty understaffed—the humane society—and under-resourced. You could have Godzilla in the backyard on a Sunday afternoon, and you're not likely to get an officer out because of the

staffing problems. And as you know, police don't like dealing with these scenarios; they're not trained to.

Obviously, if the province doesn't step up to the plate—and I know there have been some modest increases in the levels of support, but the biggest single funder of this activity is municipalities, the ones that can least afford it. Look, I have great sympathy. I was with Mayor McMullan from St. Catharines down at the Chetwood community centre on Saturday afternoon, the seniors' centre, cutting a ribbon there because they had renovated the place. I was there with Malcolm Allen, the newly elected member of Parliament, Jim Bradley and a couple of the city councillors. I had occasion to commend the city of St. Catharines for its support for this small seniors' centre, because city councils are in an unenviable position, especially in those towns like ours, where industrial jobs have been lost and industries shut down. Not only do those communities lose those jobs and those incomes, but they also lose the tax base. Then you've got an irrational and unaccountable actual value assessment system that, oh, the Liberals railed against when they were in opposition but have done nothing to change since coming to power, other than to freeze assessment for two years, so that now people are getting whacked, as Mr. Marchese is wont to say, after two years of frozen assessment, upon opening up their assessment notices.

We're going to get this bill ready for proclamation, I suspect, this afternoon. It's interesting: Just this morning, I was talking to my neighbour Ms. Rosie, and she has the Road Warrior, one of her several cats that are very well taken care of. The Road Warrior was having some dental work done, some teeth removed, over at Main West Animal Hospital. You've got to understand: I know the Road Warrior. Ms. Rosie's cats are semi-feral. She spends a fortune caring for them. The vet is—

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Are they half-pregnant?

Mr. Peter Kormos: No, no. Listen to me. The vet—I don't know what kind of car he or she drives, but the vet has done well by Ms. Rosie and her semi-feral cats. Well, you've got to understand. There are feral cats, there are domesticated cats and there are cats that can't quite make up their minds.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I thought you said "semi-sterile."

Mr. Peter Kormos: Good grief. Ms. Sandals thought I said "semi-sterile."

Mrs. Liz Sandals: That's why I was questioning the story.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Good grief. It's like being half-neutered.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Exactly. That's why I was questioning your—

Mr. Peter Kormos: Well, no, you should understand "half-neutered." That's like being in the Liberal backbenches.

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Kormos: It's a concept that is very familiar to Liberal backbenchers.

But here's Road Warrior getting his dental work done at the Main West Animal Hospital but this very morning—the Road Warrior and his semi-feral colleagues.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Thank you. That I understand.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I'm sure Mrs. Sandals understands "feral" and "semi-feral" as well.

He receives the very best of treatment.

Look forward to Mr. Zimmer's continuing advocacy for regulation of private zoos. We need that debate, because we have to, I think, at this point decide whether there is even a role for private zoos. I'm talking about commercial zoos as compared to private collections or people who have a serious scientific interest in a particular animal or breed of animal. It's a lost opportunity. Zimmer is one of the best on the Liberal benches, and for him to have been shot down like that by the Premier is truly regrettable.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Dave Levac: The member from Welland is well known for his presentations and his capacity to get to the point and also entertain us at the same time, so I appreciate some of those pieces of entertainment. I'm sure Mr. Zimmer would appreciate that too.

But having said that, I do want to reinforce a couple of the points that he made about the roadside zoos. It has not been lost on the government in clarity. We've talked about it at committee. We talked about it in the briefings. We talked about the potential of where we can assist in doing that. The government is taking some action, as I pointed out to the critic, to ensure that some of that gets dealt with on the financial side, which is the increased funding of up to \$500,000 to support inspection and agent training and an additional one-time \$100,000 funding to support training specific to zoo inspection plans, working with MNR and CAZA, in order for us to understand what they are doing to bring that safety and the concerns that were raised by Mr. Zimmer, the member from Willowdale, in his attempts to ensure that there was some type of inspection happening. So some of those things were happening, as the member well knows.

In terms of some of the areas that the legislation does not deal with—which is fair, because it was pointed out in the presentations as well, and in the briefings, that the three areas were before OSPCA inspection—we would have the accepted farm practices so that we wouldn't be seen doing anything extraordinarily different from what we normally do with agriculture standards of animal care and the science and research under the animal bill that already exists in terms of taking care of animals that are being used for research and science. The third area would be the anglers and hunters, which were exempted from that because they are already covered under legislation.

Having said that, the critic from your party indicated that she wanted to see those expanded in ways in which regulation could tune that up, and I think that is being discussed as we speak.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I always listen carefully to the member from Welland because he brings a lot to the discussion, and in this case he certainly brought up a number of interesting and valid concerns.

From our point of view in our caucus—and I can't speak for everyone in our caucus, but I know that we want to make sure that animal safety is a priority. Certainly I would think that some of the information we're receiving from our constituents—indeed, in my riding, I have three zoos that I have heard from. One is quite well respected, the Bowmanville Zoo, and the zoo keeper there is Michael Patrick, and I believe his wife is a doctor of veterinary medicine. As well, I have Jungle Cat World, which is in Orono, on 35-115, and is mostly exotic cats and other species. Also, they're very much in support of having standards; in fact, they believe that they are in compliance today. However, with this particular bill, there seems to be a bit of a non-animal issue going on here, where the thrust is to eliminate any reference to a private zoo. This has them concerned.

Northwood is another zoo in my riding where they have a similar concern. They're very much interested in animal welfare, to the extent that they are actually recovering animals that perhaps are in unsatisfactory conditions and are acting in the best interests of protecting the animals, and yet they feel threatened as well.

These organizations in my riding have called me, talked to me and felt that there is not the proper balance in this legislation. So I think the member from Welland has raised some issues, as we have as well, but the government at the end of the day has the majority of the votes and they will ram this through without much consideration for any amendments that we might have made. So with that, I just want to be on the record as saying that I listened to the people that look after animals in my riding and I think they're right.

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The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: What can one say about the member from Welland? We're just really, really glad he's on our team in the New Democrats. I heard his comments about roadside zoos address the fact that this legislation doesn't have, really, anything to say about zoo animals, farm animals, animals involved in medical research, or native and wildlife. The fact that someone can still have a tiger as a pet without breaking a law says a lot about the inadequacy of Bill 50. We hope that the government takes that to heart and expands, through regulation, the ability of the inspectors to inspect, to go into situations where a tiger is kept as a pet. I certainly know that when I spent time in the country there were many of my farmers who had pets that were exotics and, thankfully, most of them looked after them relatively well, but the fact that they could have them and nobody knew and nobody oversaw the treatment of those animals, including the possible escape of those animals, as we saw with Wally this last week, is a problem and

needs to be addressed. So the member from Welland really highlighted that.

I promised another good quote. Here's one from W.C. Fields, a good one: "Horse sense is a thing a horse has which keeps it from betting on people." I like that. Just so you know.

Certainly, we hope that this isn't the end of this conversation; that the government continues to feed us and feed myself the information that I requested. We hope that the government takes to heart what they've heard from the deputants in terms of regulation and we hope that the government doesn't stop in bringing forward legislation that has more teeth in it, that's going to protect animals across the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments? The member from Welland, did you wish to make a response?

Mr. Peter Kormos: Thank you kindly, Speaker. The bill is going to pass in, I suspect, a few more moments. It's then up to the government to make sure that those charged with the responsibility to address animal welfare and public safety vis-à-vis animals, have the resources that they need to do their jobs.

I should mention that Ms. DiNovo, the member for Parkdale-High Park, was the steward of the opposition to this bill for the NDP during its course through committee. She took on that responsibility because of her passion about the issue, but also her concern for the Toronto Humane Society and the manner in which it was going to be very negatively impacted by the then-section 6. Ms. DiNovo was an enthusiastic advocate for the THS, Toronto Humane Society, and for those who care about animal welfare. She displayed a remarkable pan-Ontario sensitivity, because while an urban and urbane woman, she also demonstrated a remarkable familiarity with, as I say, the culture of rural Ontario, the culture of agricultural Ontario and the needs of those very specific communities.

To Mr. Zimmer I say, continue to struggle. We join you in your battle with your Premier's office to get a proper zoo regulatory regime enacted in this province. I couldn't be prouder than to stand in solidarity with you in your struggle with an oppressive Premier's office that so often ignores its back bench and simply calls upon them as voting machines and to do the heavy lifting, but takes all the glory for itself.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Are there any other honourable members who wish to participate in this debate?

Seeing none, Mr. Bartolucci has moved third reading of Bill 50. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

I believe the ayes have it.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

INCREASING ACCESS TO QUALIFIED HEALTH PROFESSIONALS FOR ONTARIANS ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 VISANT À ACCROÎTRE L'ACCÈS DES ONTARIENNES ET DES ONTARIENS AUX PROFESSIONNELS DE LA SANTÉ QUALIFIÉS

Mr. Bentley, on behalf of Mr. Caplan, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 97, An Act to increase access to qualified health professionals for all Ontarians by amending the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 / *Projet de loi 97, Loi visant à accroître l'accès des Ontariennes et des Ontariens aux professionnels de la santé qualifiés en modifiant la Loi de 1991 sur les professions de la santé réglementées.*

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Did you wish to begin the debate?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I will be sharing almost all of my time with the member from Etobicoke-Lakeshore, who has worked so very hard on this matter and will be carrying the very important reasons why we need to pass third reading of this important legislation, which will improve access to health care for all Ontarians as quickly as possible. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: It's my pleasure to speak during third reading debate of the government's proposed legislation, Increasing Access to Qualified Health Professionals for Ontarians Act.

As those in this House will recall, Bill 97 was introduced in the last legislative session by the Honourable George Smitherman and passed second reading prior to being referred for review to the Standing Committee on Social Policy. Bill 97 would place a duty on health regulatory colleges that govern the health professions in Ontario to work in consultation with the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to ensure, as a matter of public interest, that Ontarians have access to adequate numbers of qualified, skilled and competent health professionals. The bill ensures that the health regulatory colleges recognize that they are key partners in the provision of health human resources in the province. The bill is part of a larger government plan to get more qualified internationally trained doctors practising here in Ontario. The government plan is based on a report I had the privilege to work on and draft, entitled Report on Removing Barriers for International Medical Doctors.

I want to take a few minutes and talk a little bit about the contents of that report and how Bill 97 falls into this comprehensive plan. A critical element of making progress when it comes to better integrating internationally trained medical professionals is having a plan that's flexible and that recognizes the individual nature of one's life experiences in the life you led before you came to Ontario. The action plan that I suggested to improve

access to health care by accrediting more internationally trained doctors had five elements.

The first was to fast-track, simplify and streamline the registration process for doctors already practising in other provinces, in the United States or in any other country with a health care system comparable to our own. The second was to help internationally trained doctors enter medical practice in Ontario with the creation of a transitional licence, which would allow them to practise under supervision while they complete required education or gain specific practical experience. The third was to undertake assessments more efficiently to allow internationally trained doctors to get on with their education and integrate into Ontario's medical system. The fourth element of the plan was to provide individualized bridging support, which would include cultural and language education, mentorship and hands-on training. The fifth was to develop a coordinated, individualized assistance for those seeking to transfer their international medical skills and knowledge to another area of the health profession or related career.

We all know that in seeking to relocate to Ontario, internationally trained doctors face a number of barriers, including lack of Canadian job experience and references, challenges with respect to credential recognition, misinformation regarding certification and registration, and, in some instances, limited language and communication skills.

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The reason that Bill 97 and the regulatory colleges play a key partnership role with the province is clear, because the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario is the regulatory body responsible for setting the entry-to-practice requirements and registering physicians in Ontario. The profession of medicine is regulated under the Medicine Act; the Medicine Act governs the registration of physicians. As is the case with all health professions, the Medicine Act falls within the regulatory framework umbrella of the Regulated Health Professions Act, the act which Bill 97 amends. For an internationally trained doctor to become eligible to practise in Ontario, he or she must satisfy the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario registration requirements and obtain a certificate of registration. In short, there are two routes to medical practice in Ontario: Complete the rigid requirements established and put in place for those pursuing medical school and registration in Ontario, or undergo a lengthy and oftentimes cumbersome practical assessment to prove one's ability to practise medicine in Ontario.

The new system that we intend to create must assist and assess candidates based on their individual skills and education. I'm very pleased to state that progress has been made since the introduction of Bill 97. Over the summer, we worked in collaboration with the College of Physicians and Surgeons on policy changes that would ease the transition for internationally trained doctors to practise. On September 18, the college approved a new policy that will make it possible for physicians licensed

in other parts of Canada to become registered to practise in Ontario. Doctors who are licensed to practise in the US can move to Ontario and practise medicine if they've completed US postgrad training and examinations. This new policy will come into effect on December 1, just a few short days from now.

Moving forward from this, it is now our intention to continue to work with the College of Physicians and Surgeons, to continue to examine the barriers and build on what we have previously established in co-operation with them and continue to break down the barriers that face internationally trained medical physicians.

We had an opportunity in public hearings on Bill 97 to hear from a number of organizations and get their input with respect to Bill 97. We heard support from patient advocacy groups like that of Dr. Bob Frankford of the Sickle Cell Association of Ontario. He indicated that a greater ability of internationally trained physicians to practise in Ontario would be of particular benefit to the patients on behalf of whom he advocates.

We heard from experts such as Dr. Jean Augustine, of the Office of the Fairness Commissioner. The Honourable Jean Augustine is the Fairness Commissioner of Ontario. She made submissions before the committee that indicated that Bill 97 and FARPA, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, share a common goal: Bill 97 aims to improve access to health care for the people of Ontario, and FARPA's amendments to the RHPA aim to improve registration in the health professions. In the context of the current shortage of health care practitioners in Ontario, it is crucial to ensure better access to the professions for qualified applicants. This will be a major step toward improving access to health care for all Ontarians.

We also heard from the CPSO and its president, Dr. Preston Zuliani, who said that they were "definitely in agreement with working" with the ministry. So we will continue. The next step for the CPSO is to facilitate registration for physicians from other jurisdictions beyond North America with a system comparable to our own. Consultations are currently under way, and we look forward to continuing to work with them to break down those barriers.

I want to correct a bit of misinformation, perhaps, that has circulated. This bill, Bill 97, does not place the sole responsibility of access on the regulatory colleges. Rather, it acknowledges the vital role that they play in helping us to implement solutions to the growing supply needs we have in our health care system. Once passed, Bill 97 would solidify Ontario's leadership in providing opportunities for internationally trained doctors to practise medicine. It would further dismantle barriers and allow qualified, competent, practise-ready, internationally trained doctors to provide care to Ontarians.

Certainly, I want to thank everyone who attended before committee and I want to express my appreciation to all those who made deputations with respect to Bill 97.

I want to also extend my appreciation for the work done by the dedicated professionals at the Ministry of

Health and HealthForceOntario, as well as all those advocacy groups that had an opportunity over the last many years to tell the stories of Ontarians who were trained and practised medicine in another part of the world and had expertise and ability that they wanted to bring to Ontario to help us provide the best health care that we can to Ontarians. Those stories and those realities have been critical in helping us, as a government, to break down and find opportunity for those Ontarians.

I also want to take a moment and thank the municipalities. Almost 100 municipalities came forward to our government to indicate their support and encouragement for the work that we are undertaking and that they too wanted to work in partnership with the province in breaking down barriers with respect to those who want to practise medicine in Ontario and have not, as of yet, had the opportunity to do that.

I want to also thank my colleague across the House the NDP member from Nickel Belt and the NDP, who in respect of Bill 97 and the work that's being done to break down barriers for international medical graduates and those trained abroad have been an example of how this Legislature can work well. It is important for those who have knowledge, who all want the best for their communities, who want to ensure that Ontarians have the best health care that we can provide and that it's in each of our communities and that there's access to emergency rooms and access to family physicians, and who also want to provide opportunity for those who would choose or who have chosen to make Ontario their home. I think that they'd be proud to see the co-operative efforts that have taken place in this House.

Bill 97 is one part of that broader plan. It's a critical part, though, and it's a foundational element to making the change that we need to see in Ontario—and having those who regulate the professions be part of finding the solutions to the problems that exist for those who are knocking at the door and want to practise medicine here in Ontario.

I want to talk for a little bit about other elements of the work the province has undertaken with respect to breaking down those barriers.

It gives me great pride to tell this Legislature that Ontarians already have the services of more than 5,000 internationally trained doctors. These 5,000 doctors represent almost a quarter of our physician workforce.

Some 630 international medical graduates, or IMGs, as they are referred to, are currently in residency training. Those IMGs have the right skills, but some lack licensing requirements. They can now practise in Ontario with certain restrictions. Some international medical graduates are working under the supervision of a practising doctor while working toward full independent practice, and others are practising only within a restricted specialty area.

We're bringing a new lens to the registration and integration of those trained in medicine around the world, and we're making sure that we don't continue to move forward with a one-size-fits-all cookie-cutter approach,

because those who come to our province from around the world bring a variety of backgrounds, a variety of experiences, a variety of mechanisms in which they are trained. Perhaps they are a Canadian student and they chose to go abroad to a school to get some well-known expertise. If that individual wants to come back to Ontario and practise medicine, we want them to be able to do that.

There are now more than 500 international medical graduates currently taking advantage of government-funded training and assessment opportunities. That includes some 235 international medical graduates who gained training or assessment positions in the 2007-08 year.

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I think it is absolutely important that Ontarians see reflected, in the debate and in the steps taken in this Legislature, a government that wants the same Ontario that they want. I think that Bill 97 is one part of our government's comprehensive plan to bring Ontario to the 21st century, to improve access to medical care in our province, and make real and meaningful progress when it comes to better welcoming and integrating international medical doctors. So I very much hope that all members of this House will stand and support Bill 97.

A healthy Ontario means access to safe, quality health care services. We all know that too many Ontarians do not have access to a family physician, yet every single day we're reminded, whether through our newspapers, through the news media, or through people we meet in our constituency offices, that there are many qualified, safe and competent international medical doctors who have chosen to come to Ontario—often for a better life for their family—but cannot practise here. Bill 97 is one part of a comprehensive action plan that will help us continue to break down barriers for those who have trained in medicine internationally, and will help us provide health care that Ontarians want and need.

I'm very proud to have had the privilege to work on a project like this. I've said this before. I spoke, in my very first speech in the Legislature, about how it was not acceptable that we lived in a province where these barriers existed. We need to take a step-by-step approach to reducing and minimizing those barriers. I believe that the report and the five-point action plan established do that. It speaks to the variety of skill sets that individuals will have when they are trained, not in Ontario but around the world. Whether they are trained in another province or in the United States, those doctors will now be able to practise here as of December 1.

But more needs to be done. Bill 97 is the opportunity to establish a new foundation, a foundation of partnership, a foundation where the regulatory colleges recognize that they too have a role to play when it comes to ensuring that we all in Ontario are able to provide access to physicians, physicians that Ontarians need to heal them when they're sick and keep them well.

I'm very pleased to debate Bill 97 today. I hope that we will see its quick passage in the Legislature and that

we will be able to get on to further actions to continue to break down barriers for those who have trained in medicine around the world.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'm pleased to comment on the comments by the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore. Certainly we all have experiences in our ridings, but the story that comes to my mind is the story about one of my constituents who came from Iran, who was a trained surgeon—years and years of training. He was in his 40s. He expected that he would have to do something to qualify in surgery here, but what he didn't expect was the news he received, which was that he would have to put in 10 years to be a qualified surgeon.

He wasn't prepared to go back to school for 10 years, so he worked as a baker for \$9 an hour while a million Ontarians go without a family doctor, and many of those need surgery. In fact, the result of his particular and sad story is that he travels back to Iran for six months of the year to work as a surgeon so that he can support his family in Toronto for the other six months of the year. This is absurd. This is the situation we find ourselves in.

I remember when the College of Physicians and Surgeons came to my riding. We held internationally trained professionals evening where we invited health professionals from other lands. We invited the College of Nurses. I was struck by the fact that it seemed to me—now, perhaps I'm mistaken—that they had a quota system on the number of new internationally trained professionals they let into the profession. Certainly in a province where we have desperate need for trained medical staff, both nursing and doctors—and I must say that the nurses did not strike me in that way at all, but seemed much more open to welcoming in those who are internationally trained—we support the government in this. It's a skinny little bill. It's one page and hardly qualifies as a bill, but if this is what it takes, then we in the New Democratic Party are for it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: I wanted to comment on the remarks of the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore and the great work she's done in moving the yardstick a little further on this issue of qualified, internationally trained doctors.

Just yesterday I was in one of my favourite grocery stores in my riding, Lady York, and a gentleman from Libya was talking with me about this very subject. He said that he knows some doctors from Libya who are trying to practise here in Canada and they've had some problems. I did mention to him that one of the best plastic surgeons in Toronto is a doctor from Libya, who is practising, I think, at Scarborough Centenary Hospital.

It is a perplexing challenge that all governments have had. But just to put it in perspective, one of the things we have to understand is that the Ontario government is spending over \$200 million a year on training foreign-trained, international doctors. The IMG program is the most comprehensive program in North America training

internationally trained doctors. So it does take resources, but it also takes willpower and a mindset change. Some of our regulatory colleges, like the College of Physicians and Surgeons, have sometimes been gatekeepers and they've made it very difficult for people to become doctors. Then our own rules: Even our Canadian provinces have barriers to Canadian-trained doctors going from province to province, never mind from countries like Libya. So there are all kinds of reasons to do this.

But the other thing we have to keep in mind is that we shouldn't be actively recruiting doctors from many of these countries, because those doctors are needed in developing countries. That's the other role Immigration Canada should play, ensuring that those doctors trying to immigrate are given the facts: that they won't be instant doctors. And there's no need to recruit people, because they are needed in developing countries.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments.

Mr. John O'Toole: First, just to acknowledge the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore in her role as parliamentary assistant: I think she did some pretty good work as minister, and now she's been relegated to commenting on work. When I look at Bill 97, I see nothing in here. There it is; this is their solution for a doctor shortage. What we've got in Ontario is embarrassing, quite frankly. Here's why I say it. We have the health tax, which is about—what?—over \$2 billion a year, and do we have any more doctors? No. In fact, in my riding, one of the biggest issues is a doctor shortage. They've been there almost—it's getting into their second term—well along five years, and we still haven't solved the problem. When you look at this bill, what it does, it says here: "It is the duty of the college to work in consultation with the minister to ensure, as a matter of public interest, that the people of Ontario have access to adequate numbers of qualified, skilled and competent regulated health professionals."

There's nothing here about adding or setting goals in accountability and targets. In my riding of Durham, for instance, with Lakeridge hospital and the three communities I represent, which would be Uxbridge, Port Perry-Lake Scugog township and Orono/Clarington, each one of them has a physician recruitment committee. For each one of them, the municipal councils are ponying up \$25,000 or more to go on these trips to meet with the new residency and internship programs, and there's not enough money for our hospitals. I met with Lakeridge Health on Friday, and the new CEO of that hospital told me that they have a deficit this year, and next year it will be \$10 million.

They haven't done one thing to fix the health care problems. It's embarrassing how we've got one bill here and the PA is talking about more doctors. This problem is bigger than you, the report you've written, and I can't wait until our member from Kitchener–Waterloo sets you straight on it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments?

1540

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I'm happy to comment on this bill as well. I know that recruitment of doctors is a critical issue. I know that—let me just get the member's riding correct—the member from Eglinton—Lawrence mentioned gatekeepers. I think it's a lot more than the gatekeepers. I think they hold the lock and key, and I'm not sure it's not thrown away, from the interpretation of this issue that I've heard.

We have to think outside the box. We have to think of alternative ways, alternative methods. For example, I know that what they did in Kapuskasing—and this might be a heads-up to the minister or the PA—was provide for a retired specialist to come in once a year. The individual used to enjoy cross-country skiing, of all things, so they provided the individual with a house and free cross-country skiing on the trails in Kapuskasing and, lo and behold, they had a doctor who was up there providing service on a specialty basis once a year to ensure that that community and the local communities were being taken care of in the proper way. We have to think outside the box.

My colleague the member from Durham mentioned recruitment services. I hear the same thing. I know the executive director of the chamber of commerce is part of that, and he's absolutely convinced. We've been trying to tell him that we're robbing Peter to pay Paul in this particular situation, where the recruitment takes individuals from one community that all of a sudden becomes depressed, and it's not answering the question. What we have to do is ensure that we think outside the box, that we think and work in conjunction and make sure there is portability between the provinces and other jurisdictions in the immediate area. I know locally that Councillor Joe Kolodzie's cousin came in from another jurisdiction and it was going to be five years before the individual was going to be able to practise in Ontario. Within six months he was practising as a specialist in Boston.

Those are some of the things we have to look at, to make sure we can break those barriers. I think that nurse practitioners were the first step. Some individuals or sectors of society were not overly supportive, but it was the right thing to do in providing health care service for a lot of communities. We need to think outside the box and move forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore has two minutes to respond.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I want to thank the member for Parkdale—High Park for her comments with respect to nurses and the differential approach between the regulatory College of Nurses and the physicians of Ontario. There's a great deal we can learn from the nursing profession as to how they have mentored and assisted those who are internationally trained. In fact, that's something we spoke about at the committee hearings on this bill. We talked about the success rates of the bridging programs of the nursing profession to make sure that internationally trained nurses would be able to qualify and practise in Ontario. That's the type of model we look

to working on with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, other health care professional bodies and educational bodies to provide and assist in terms of the bridging and mentorship programs that form part of the recommendations set out in this report with respect to removing barriers.

The member for Eglinton—Lawrence said this is a challenge that has been faced by all governments and that we need to change the mindset. I think that is very much what Bill 97 does. It changes the parameters in which we operate. It says there's a partnership here. You need to ensure that physicians are qualified, safe and competent—absolutely, no question—but in the same instance, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario and the other regulatory bodies need to acknowledge that it is not acceptable to put in place criteria that eliminate without foundation those who could practise here but for the fact that much of their training and education was found around the world.

The member for Durham and the member for Oshawa talked about thinking outside the box. I would encourage them to read a little bit about the steps that are being established and pay attention to their municipalities, because their municipalities support this legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm glad to join the debate on Bill 97, which basically does a very simple thing, and that is to amend the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991, by adding only one single sentence. I just want to remind people in this House, and certainly anybody watching at home, that the legislation says merely that it is the duty of the college "to work in consultation with the minister ... to ensure, as a matter of public interest, that the people of Ontario have access to adequate numbers of qualified, skilled and competent regulated health professionals." That's it; that's the bill. And despite the government's attempts to promote this as a vehicle that is going to open the floodgates for foreign-trained doctors, it says nothing of the kind. The government has spent the last number of weeks talking about how this is going to improve access for foreign-trained professionals. Basically, what it's doing is acknowledging that the government has not been able to meet its objective—and I'll talk about that a little later on—when the Premier promised a doctor for everybody in the province in 2003. Of course, he promised other health care professionals as well. I want to make it abundantly clear that this bill does not in any place refer to foreign-trained professionals. The government can say what it wants; it can pretend what it wants. The reality is that it's not going to produce them. It's not going to improve access for them. What it does do, however, is recognize that the government wasn't able to meet its objectives, to make sure they had the required numbers of doctors, nurses and other health professionals in the province of Ontario to meet the needs of the people living here.

In some respects, they are now abdicating some of this responsibility to the colleges and making the colleges accountable for making sure that the numbers of quali-

fied, skilled and competent regulated health professionals are here. The truth is, the government doesn't have a long-range human resource plan. They don't have any plan. They have operated for about five years now simply from one crisis to another. The unfortunate reality is that the shortage of health care professionals is growing. As we see a large greying, older population moving through the province, we know that those individuals are going to require more care. Regrettably, we are going to be faced with an even greater shortage of health care professionals, because there is no long-term resource plan to meet the needs of individuals.

This bill, then, is going to force, make it a duty of the colleges—and there are 23 regulatory colleges—to take over the responsibility of addressing the shortage of health care professionals, even though their duty right now is to protect the public. I don't think any of us know what the impact will be as far as the responsibility they already have, which is to protect the public.

So we have Bill 97, which doesn't speak to foreign-trained professionals. But it does, I guess, address an issue, and that is the fact that the government hasn't been able to respond to the need for doctors. Five years ago, Premier McGuinty did promise that he was going to recruit and train more doctors. In fact, five years ago he said that no person would go without the medical attention they needed. However, here we are five years later and we still have almost one million people without a family doctor. That's the same number we had five years ago.

I want to read into the record at least one e-mail that I received from someone in the province of Ontario. As MPPs, we regularly get letters and e-mails and phone calls from people who are absolutely desperate. They don't have a family doctor, and they need a prescription renewed, or they need a test done, or they simply have a health issue that requires a family doctor and they don't know what to do.

I want to read an e-mail I received from Ms. Catherine Lau. It says:

"Dear Mrs. Witmer,

"I, like many of my family, friends, and neighbours, am extremely concerned about Ontario's doctor shortage.

"Over 850,000 Ontarians don't have a family doctor, three out of 10 physicians are likely to retire in the next five years, and our emergency rooms and hospitals are becoming increasingly crowded as a result.

"Something must be done! And I'm looking to you to help provide the solution.

"I am urging you to do everything in your power to help solve Ontario's doctor shortage."

As I say, we hear from many, many people who are concerned about this issue. The unfortunate reality is that the situation in this province, in many ways, has worsened over the past five years, in that Ontario has now become no longer the jurisdiction of choice for doctors. The other unfortunate consequence of the past five years is that since 2003 the number of communities designated as underserved for family physicians has increased from 122 to 140. Since 2005, the number of doctors who

have fled Ontario has increased year after year. We also know that we're going to soon lose another 2,600 doctors to retirement.

1550

Of course, we also know that the economy is not doing well currently, but according to the Ontario Medical Association, 83% of people believe Ontario's doctor shortage negatively affects economic growth in their community. So if we're going to help bring some stability to the economy and see the creation of new jobs, we know that those communities also need to have the physicians and the health services in place in order to help with that economic growth.

The other very startling statistic is the fact that a third of Ontario's medical school graduates leave the province within two years of completing their training. Obviously, the government needs to take some action in order to increase the number of physicians in the province, make sure they don't flee to other jurisdictions and somehow ensure that those doctors nearing retirement are encouraged to continue to practise; and, of course, they need to take a look at some of the steps that could be taken to make this a more attractive place to practise medicine.

First of all, I believe that we need to create a new school of medicine, and we need to continue to expand the medical school spaces here. I would like to remind everyone that it was our Progressive Conservative government that announced the Northern Ontario School of Medicine in 2001. Of course, if we take a look at that, we can see that this strategic investment has had a very positive impact on the north and also on the ability to provide doctors to the residents.

I want to read from the Sudbury Star on June 11 this year, which says:

"When the \$100-million Northern Ontario School of Medicine first opened on the campuses at Laurentian ... and Lakehead ... there were lofty predictions that it would help to change the face of medicine in the north.

"With the announcement (on June the 9th) that five young doctors educated at the ... school have agreed to practise in ... Sudbury upon completion of their residencies, it appears to be on its way to doing just that.

"The excitement generated by the medical school was that of so much potential. Some of the doctors trained here would stay here, and with the established cancer research centre and Sudbury Regional Hospital's designation as a teaching hospital, greater Sudbury was to be a model for how to shepherd a culture of health care education and research. Most importantly, the medical school was to provide family doctors for desperately underserved communities in northern Ontario for years to come.

"With the announcement of an agreement by the five graduating doctors to practise here, the school can point to tangible success in this crucial area.

"Said Dr. Roger Strasser, founding dean of the school of medicine on the occasion of the official opening of the first medical school in Canada in 35 years: 'The Northern Ontario School of Medicine is the jewel in the crown of northern Ontario ... and Canada.'" Indeed it is.

That first year, there were 32 students in Sudbury and another 24 in Thunder Bay. It's providing students with the opportunity to train in communities throughout the north. That was our intention. When we identified we had a doctor shortage, we recognized the need: the need to educate these young people close to home. In 2007, 91% of the first-year students were from northern Ontario. Before the school opened, they would have trained elsewhere in the province and perhaps been enticed to practise where they were educated. It might have been London, maybe Kingston or maybe Toronto. There were more than 2,000 applications received for the 2007-08 academic year; 9% of the students in that year were self-identified aboriginals and 27% self-identified francophones, which is a good reflection of northern demographics. I would encourage this government to recognize that there are many, many men and women in this province who are interested in becoming physicians. I would encourage them to open a new medical school if we ever hope to make progress toward having enough doctors in the province of Ontario to provide for the needs of our residents. They also need to continue to expand medical spaces at the schools we currently have.

Secondly, the government of Ontario should establish an independent human resource planning body for health care professionals. This is extremely important. Our shortage of health care providers is going to persist—not just this year, not three years from now, five or 10—unless we do the necessary strategic planning. Even Dr. Preston Zuliani, the chair of the council of the College Of Physicians and Surgeons, when he appeared before the Standing Committee on Social Policy on October 27, said, “Increasing the number of health care professionals is an important but long-term and complicated goal.” He said that the government should “establish an independent health human resources ... body.” They feel this is particularly critical, given what it says in the legislation, that the colleges now are going to be responsible for making sure that we have the number of doctors that are going to be required.

If we're not training them, where are we going to get them? There are only so many foreign-trained doctors, and we all know that we shouldn't be poaching these doctors from other jurisdictions where they're also desperately needed. We need to recognize that we have to train our own young people. As you know, Mr. Speaker, currently many of our young people who hope to become doctors have gone to Australia, New Zealand and Ireland. I'll tell you, it's tough for them to come back and enter practice in the province of Ontario. We always seem to set up some barriers so they end up going to the States, and once they go there, they're gone. These are young people that we've educated here. They've had their undergrad, their secondary, their elementary school, and they want to come back, but we just make it very tough.

We've got to set up an independent human resource planning body in order to identify how many health care professionals we need in five, 10, 15, 20, 25 years. We've got to take a look at the demographics. We've got

to take a look at what kind of health care professional is going to be required. We've already heard about the absolute shortage of geriatricians at a time when our population is aging. We don't have enough to meet the demands, and our older people could be enjoying a much higher quality of life if we had the number of geriatricians that were required. Unfortunately, family doctors simply don't have the skills. They don't have the training to provide all the support that is necessary to our older individuals.

Thirdly, the government should implement not only this independent human resource planning body for health care professionals, they should implement a comprehensive long-term physician recruitment strategy. This strategy should be informed by the targets and the data set out by the independent human resource planning body. But instead of taking this type of action, which actually would take a look at the population as we move forward, take a look at the demographics—how many people are going to be between the ages of birth and five, how many between the ages of 20 and 30, how many over the age of 65, and how many over the age of 80?—the government has decided to do nothing more than introduce a bill which says, “It is the duty of the college to work in consultation with the minister to ensure, as a matter of public interest, that the people of Ontario have access to adequate numbers of qualified, skilled and competent regulated health professionals.” Talk about an abdication of responsibility. And yet they've talked about this bill over and over again, as though this is going to be the bill that refers to foreign-trained doctors, is going to enable, is going to give access to all those foreign-trained doctors who are desperately looking to practise in the province. It does absolutely nothing of the kind.

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Let's talk about these international medical graduates. Our party supports the need to make sure that qualified international medical graduates have the opportunity to practise in this province. We know that one of the ways that we're going to expand the number of health professionals is to make sure that those in this province already have the opportunity to practise.

We know that you also have to set high medical standards. That was reinforced by CPSO when they came to see us. Again, Dr. Zuliani had this to say: “The college's first priority is, and must remain, the safety of the public. Ontarians want more doctors. They also want the comfort of knowing they are being cared for by qualified doctors....” He went on to say, “Increasing access to qualification has been a priority for us,” and he pointed out:

“For the fourth straight year, more certificates were issued to international medical graduates than to our own Ontario graduates.

“Twenty-five per cent of independent medical certificates, or one out of every four, went to international medical graduates.”

So the college has certainly done what they can to ensure that the qualified IMGs have access to practise.

And you know what? We can make sure that international medical graduates have the same opportunity in all of the other medical professions. We need to help them bridge these programs.

In fact, there's been a lot of frustration amongst the international medical graduates. They've come to see me in Toronto and in my riding of Kitchener-Waterloo. They feel at times that they don't get the support that they need from the government in order to help them move up and become fully qualified. One of the suggestions that they had for helping international medical graduates was to increase the number of residency positions available in Ontario, a great suggestion because you can't practise if you haven't gone through that. They said that they needed to continue to reduce the barriers to registration and training for IMGs to access alternative medical professions. They needed to support IMGs through a physician bridging program comparable to other professions and they needed to allow IMGs to update their medical credentials through the support of government funding programs. I hope that the government is certainly going to move forward on some of those suggestions.

Having said that, we need to recognize that we need to solve the problem within our own province. We need to train enough physicians in this province. We can't continue to poach health professionals from other provinces where they are desperately needed as well. So for the McGuinty government to continue to imply that Bill 97 is going to be the panacea for helping foreign-trained doctors find work in Ontario is wrong, but this is what they say.

On June 16 a Ministry of Health news release stated, "Ontario is introducing new legislation that would ease the way for internationally trained health care providers to practise in the province." Where in that one sentence does it make any reference to foreign-trained, internationally-trained? It doesn't refer to those health care providers. Again misleading, they released a news release on September 19 which boasted, "In June the Ontario government introduced legislation that would ease the way for internationally trained health care providers to practise in the province." Well, it doesn't mention internationally trained health care providers in this one line at all. So it's totally misleading to say this because there is no reference to IMGs.

Now, during the Standing Committee on Estimates, our party sought some clarification on this issue, and I asked the former Minister of Health if his bill specifically referenced foreign-trained doctors or international medical graduates, because I couldn't see those words in the one line. The minister was at least honest, and he did confirm that there was absolutely no reference to foreign-trained professionals or international medical graduates in his one-line bill. The minister went on to suggest that the legislation was "a statement on behalf of the patients, to bring added influence of the patients' circumstances into the work of the regulatory bodies," whatever that means.

Bill 97 was introduced around the same time as a report entitled Report on Removing Barriers for International Medical Doctors was brought forward by the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health. The government suggests that this report outlines how Ontario will improve access to medical care in Ontario and will make meaningful progress with respect to better welcoming and integrating IMGs into our province, but I have read the report, and in some respects it reads more like a policy statement than a plan. The report is somewhat light on detail, heavy on rhetoric, and it absolutely lacks actual documentation to support its recommendations. So it was that report, introduced around the time of Bill 97, that allowed the government to continue to try to fool the people into believing that this bill is actually going to improve access for foreign-trained doctors in the province of Ontario.

But I think when you take a look at this bill, it really does reinforce the fact that in desperation, with no other plan available, the government came forward with this. In fact, did you know that the government has broken its own promise to produce a plan to address the gaps in Ontario's health system? The McGuinty Liberals have yet to develop and publish a 10-year strategic plan for health care, a commitment, by the way, that they made under the Local Health System Integration Act, 2006. According to a 2007 Ministry of Health press release, the McGuinty Liberals promised this report would set out a vision, priorities and strategic directions for our health care system over the next 10 years.

This government won't come forward with a plan. In fact, not only have they not come forward with the plan they promised, they have stymied our efforts to access this report, including obtaining it through a freedom of information request.

So, whether it's about improving access, modernizing health infrastructure, shortening wait times or promoting good health, Ontario requires a long-term vision, which is totally lacking at this point in time because the McGuinty government has no plan, they have no vision, and they've never brought forward the plan that they promised they would in order to address the gaps which continue to grow in Ontario's health care system.

When I confronted the former Minister of Health about this issue—no plan—during the Standing Committee on Estimates, the minister agreed that his ministry hadn't achieved the due date it set out. In fact, the minister went on to suggest that the report would be published sometime in 2008. Well, it's now almost the end of November. We've still seen no plan.

In fact, the minister suggested the reason the report didn't come out in 2007, as they'd promised, is because they didn't want it to interfere with the 2007 election. Well, that election is now one year ago. The minister said, "I think the difficulty we were in, to be direct with you, was that the window last year got too close to the election." Well, I'm not sure what their excuse is today. I just know we've not seen any health plan; we have no human resource plan.

1610

This shortage of health professionals with its nurses, doctors or others is going to continue, and I suspect that we're going to see longer wait times in the province of Ontario; we're going to continue to have emergency rooms crowded and over-packed, because we've also recently learned that hospitals don't have the resources to balance their budgets. We're hearing about cuts to staff; we're hearing about service cuts.

We talk about an economy in crisis in the province of Ontario. I would say to you we have a health system that's nearing crisis and we have a government that still has not delivered a strategic plan of action to respond to the needs of the province and its people, despite its commitment to do so. So we have LHINs out there in 14 areas of this province, some of them duplicating what has already been done before, making decisions without a central plan, and lots of them are going in separate directions. I think we're going to see, at the end of the day, that the level of service provided to people in the province of Ontario is not going to be consistent, it's not going to be the same, and not everyone is going to have equal and fair access.

It's extremely disappointing when you consider how much money is being spent on health care today in this province to know that there is no plan, no strategic direction. We are spending today 46 cents of every dollar on health. Even without a plan, spending on health care is projected to rise to \$42.4 billion next year. It's getting to a point where it's going to be half of the budget. That is simply not sustainable, because the demographics show us that the number of older people is increasing very rapidly, and they're going to require more care. We know today that there are older people, 24,000 of them, who don't have a long-term-care bed and are looking for one. We know there are people in beds in acute care hospitals who could go back home, but we don't have the community home care support services that they need. There are people who could go into alternative levels of care, but the care is not available.

The situation where the needs of Ontarians are not being met is continuing to increase. This government has failed to deliver on its promise to operate with a sense of direction. It hasn't delivered. Ontarians deserve a plan. They deserve to know how this government intends to meet the challenges of rising costs, particularly in this economy when we're going to see fewer and fewer taxes coming into the coffers. The revenue that they've enjoyed these last five years, the tax and the spending, can't continue. In fact, they have now collected over \$12 billion as a result of the health tax from the pockets of hard-working Ontarians, and we have a health system that is growing worse by the day. So this government needs to develop a plan; they need to share it with Ontarians; they need to make sure that the LHINs understand where they need to be going. They need to address the rising costs, the aging population, the overcrowded emergency departments and the shortage of health care professionals.

This bill isn't going to do any of that. This bill simply hands over responsibility for the health care professional shortage and says to the colleges: "You do it. We give up. We've been able to do nothing, basically, over the past five years." Now, not only do we not have a plan, not only have they not been able to meet the needs of the Ontarians who are looking for health care providers, but I think everybody was astounded when the province announced last month that it was facing a \$500-million deficit. That was stunning because they had just a few months before said that there was probably going to be a \$5.6-billion surplus and an \$800-million reserve fund. As I said to you, they've already taken \$12.2 billion out of the pockets of hard-working families through the health tax. But then, in order to help balance their budget—unbelievable—the Premier said, "This is how we're going to do it. We're going to delay"—in other words, not hire—"the 9,000 nurses we promised"—well, they've never hired the 8,000 nurses that they promised from the first term—"and we're going to postpone the creation of the 50 family health teams."

These cuts could not be happening at a worse time. We don't have enough health care professionals. We have an aging population, with rising rates of chronic disease. We obviously are going to see more and more people with health problems in Ontario as a result of the stress that some of them are suffering now because of job losses and other pressures on family, and this government is going to take money out of health care.

Who is going to provide the care to the people in the long-term-care homes? Who is going to provide the care to the people in the hospital? Who is going to provide the care within the family health care teams? We don't have nurses now sufficient to meet the needs of the population, and this Premier and this government are saying, "Well, we're not going to hire the 9,000 we promised and—you know what?—forget the fact that we broke our first promise to hire 8,000."

It is unbelievable that this government would make that kind of announcement and indicate that it is going to take \$53 million out of health. On the other hand, as I said today in question period, when I took a look at what the government is doing as far as hiring, their hiring continues unchecked. Some 40% of the positions available are for analysts and consultants. I don't know how they see that as a higher priority than more nurses and more doctors, but I think they had better get their priorities straight.

These cuts to health care—these nurses, these family health teams, these doctors—mean that our seniors in long-term-care homes are simply going to be receiving even less care than they receive today. Our seniors today in nursing homes get less care than do seniors in most of the other provinces in Canada. They don't even get three working hours of care. Many of them are forced to sit in diapers. They could be toileted if there were staff to do that.

This is also going to mean, if we have fewer nurses, that the emergency room wait times are probably going to increase. If we have fewer family health teams, it

means that there are going to be more patients without access to primary care. It also is going to mean, if we have fewer nurses and fewer family health teams, that those people who now suffer from chronic diseases—and I regret to say the number is increasing—such as asthma and diabetes are going to have less access to care, and as a result of less access to care in managing their conditions they're going to end up with some more serious consequences—perhaps blindness, perhaps amputation—all sorts of things that could be avoided if we had the appropriate number of health care professionals to meet the care.

This Premier must live up to his promise to hire the 9,000 nurses now. He must create the family health teams that he promised, because the care is desperately needed. The reason that he's had to do this is because of the fiscal mismanagement of his government. They spent, they taxed for five years, and now, despite that revenue, we are seeing cuts being made and those cuts are on the backs of patients in hospitals, nursing homes and certainly in family health teams.

I want to tell you, not only were we shocked about the cuts of the 9,000 nurses, but Mrs. Catherine Mayers from the RNAO stated in the committee proceedings, "We were alarmed to hear in the Minister of Finance's statement this past October 22 that the government was postponing its commitment to create the 9,000 nursing positions as well as 50 health care teams.... I find it quite ironic that a bill seeking to ensure access to health professionals is going to committee at the same time that much-needed nursing positions are being delayed."

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She goes on to say, "How many more RNs are needed in Ontario?... It is safe to say that most would not want Ontario's RN population ratio to fall below that of the rest of Canada, particularly given that Canada's ratio is considerably worse than it has been in the past. Based on the latest available data, Ontario would require more than 10,000 RNs to catch up with the rest of the country. At the very least, the 9,000 promised RN positions should be delivered as quickly as possible to enhance access to health care."

So we are already short 10,000 RNs, and this Premier decides that he's not going to make the 9,000 available to people right now. This stands in stark contrast to what our government did. We established the Nursing Task Force in September 1998. They provided recommendations to me, as health minister at the time. We made an investment of \$375 million to create 10,000 new front-line and permanent nursing positions. I am pleased to say that the funding was provided for all of those positions, and in the end they supported the creation of 12,000 new permanent nursing positions, which actually was 2,000 more than the task force had recommended. So I think that the Premier certainly is in a position to take a look at what we did when we set up the task force.

He also needs to recognize, when he looks at nurses today, that Ontario was projected to lose almost 10,000 RNs who are age 50 or older to retirement or death by 2006, that the average age of an RN today has increased

to over 44, and it's estimated that we're going to see a lot of nurses retire by 2013. So we need to make sure that we invest in nurses, as opposed to doing what this Premier is doing, and that is cutting the 9,000 nursing positions.

I also want to point out that this isn't the first time they've made cuts to nursing. In January 2005, they spent \$91 million to eliminate 757 nursing positions. Of course, in recent months we are seeing nursing positions slashed at hospitals throughout the province, such as Rouge Valley, Leamington, West Nipissing, Toronto East General, St. Joseph's Health Care, and we know other hospitals in this province are also going to have to eliminate positions.

We obviously are seeing the quality of care in this province threatened for patients as nursing positions are eliminated.

Let me go back to the bill and conclude. This bill does not by any stretch of the imagination produce or improve access for foreign-trained doctors. It merely abdicates the government's responsibility to find the appropriate number of health care professionals to the 23 regulatory health colleges. This is all that this government has been able to accomplish in five years.

I want you to ask yourself, why is Dalton McGuinty not doing everything he possibly can to ensure that the needs of Ontarians are met when it comes to health care? Why is he prepared to abdicate responsibility? Why is he not announcing a new medical school so that we can train the appropriate number of doctors we need? Why is he not developing a long-term/short-term human resource plan? Why is he not developing a plan in order to ensure that we have the appropriate number of physicians in the province of Ontario? There are many initiatives that could have been undertaken by this Premier and by this province. However, this bill is not going to achieve that objective.

So I say to you today, although we will be supporting this bill, we are extremely disappointed at the lack of action and the lack of a plan that has been presented by this government in order to ensure Ontarians that their health needs are going to be met five, 10, 15, 20, and 25 years from now.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath):
Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It's my pleasure to make a few comments on the presentation made by the member from Kitchener-Waterloo. Her first point was really that this is a light bill, and I don't think anybody can argue with this. It has one page and that's all. On this point, I'd say we would all agree.

I would also agree with her position that the expansion of medical school to people of northern Ontario is something that has already given results and will give even more results as the first graduates of the northern Ontario medical school will be graduating in July 2009, a few months from now, something that everybody in the north is looking forward to.

There will be 56 new physicians graduating from the northern Ontario medical school. Two of them are of aboriginal descent and 17 of them are francophone or

able to provide medical services in both French and English. So of the over 3,300 applications they got for the first year, they selected a class that pretty well reflects the people of northern Ontario, and I would say that in the subsequent classes the same respect for the people of northern Ontario was found. I would agree with an expansion of the number of students that the Northern Ontario School of Medicine could accept; they're presently at 56. If we could increase the enrolment, that would also be very beneficial to increasing access for people of northern Ontario to physician services.

I thank the member for her comments.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments? The member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak on this very important bill. I was listening to the comments made by the member from Kitchener–Waterloo, and I'm a bit perturbed about her comments because she was Minister of Health in the past and had the opportunity to make certain changes to the system to ensure that there are more foreign medical graduates and foreign-trained doctors incorporated into our system in Ontario to ensure that we continue to provide quality health care to Ontarians.

I have been talking to many of my constituents who have practised as doctors, many of whom have graduated from other jurisdictions and have chosen Ottawa as their home, and they're quite excited about the plan that this government is putting together. They are getting involved in the process which the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario is taking in terms of the various pathways they are considering to make sure that foreign-trained doctors and graduates are fully incorporated into our health care system, providing necessary health care to Ontarians, but also ensuring that the health and the safety of Ontarians is maintained.

I very much support this bill. This is part of the plan, along with creating new medical schools and seats for medical doctors. We've seen over a 20% increase in medical seats right in Ottawa, at the University of Ottawa. These are all steps necessary to ensure that we give more Ontarians access to family practitioners, including those who have been trained outside Ontario, outside Canada.

I thank the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore for her work on this bill and continue to work with all sides of the House to ensure that this bill is passed.

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The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I am very pleased to rise this afternoon and compliment my colleague the member for Kitchener–Waterloo on her presentation on Bill 97. As she points out quite rightly, this bill does not produce or enhance access for international medical graduates, contrary to some of the rhetoric we hear from the government's side. In fact, it's a clumsy, half-hearted effort to transfer responsibility for ensuring that we have an

adequate number of health professionals on to Ontario's professional colleges, like the College of Physicians and Surgeons, for example.

The member from Kitchener–Waterloo, who has pointed this out many times in the House, again pointed out that the government does not have a health human resources strategy that we can see or that we can identify that appears to be working in any way, shape or form, and they lack any realistic plan to increase the number of qualified doctors in the province of Ontario. Clearly, the debate that has taken place on this Bill 97 shows that to be the case.

The member also pointed out her concern, as our party's health critic, that now that we have entered these difficult economic times in recent weeks and months, the government's first response seems to be to cut back on the number of nurses, or to suggest that there is no way they can keep their promise to have the 9,000 new nurses in Ontario. So their first instinct seems to be to cut front-line health services instead of readdressing some of the priorities that we've seen that are very questionable since they took office in 2003: for example, the \$400 million that they spent on the Windsor Casino; the \$2.3 million they spent having a celebratory party to open that casino, and there are a number of other examples. Of course, we remember the cricket club that received \$1 million, not knowing why they received it.

Today, as a matter of fact, I had the chance to attend the 50th anniversary of the Georgetown Hospital Volunteer Association. I want to express my appreciation to that organization, and I know they are very concerned about the government's lack of commitment to health care as well.

I'm looking forward to hearing the member from Kitchener–Waterloo respond to some of these comments, but certainly we have to call upon the government to do more in this regard.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Kormos: You folks should note that in approximately four minutes' time France Gélinas, the health critic for the NDP, is going to be beginning her lead comments in response to this legislation. I encourage people who happen to be watching to stay tuned because France Gélinas, who has a long personal history in health care, has insights into this whole issue that are enlightening to all of those who listen to her.

I'm going to have a chance to speak this later as well, and it's been noted that this is pretty light stuff. This isn't just sort of low-fat; this is thin gruel. This water has no taste whatsoever and it's hardly wet. There is so very, very little here and, if anything, it is an acknowledgment on the part of the government of its failure to effectively develop policies that truly give Ontarians more access to regulated health professionals. Think about it. This has more nerve than a toothache, when you think about this government introducing this little bit of legislation after it delisted chiropractic services, after it delisted physiotherapy and after it delisted optometry. Access to regulated health professionals also means that in a public

health care system, those services are listed services. This government has been engaged in an agenda of creating a privatized health care system which restricts people's access to regulated health professionals, does not enhance them.

I'm going to have the pleasure to speak to this once Ms. Gélinas has finished.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The member for Kitchener–Waterloo for a response.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'd like to thank the member for Nickel Belt. We certainly do look forward to her remarks.

I thank the member for Ottawa Centre, although I do take exception to the fact that he said the Liberals have a plan for health care. I think that, as I pointed out, despite the commitment that they've made, we still don't have a strategic plan, we don't know where it is we're going and, regrettably, we have 14 independent LHINs operating in the province of Ontario which also don't have a strategic plan that will help them decide where they're going to take their respective jurisdictions.

I want to thank the member for Wellington–Halton Hills, who has been a very strong advocate in all things related to health care, from the initiative Healthy Babies, Healthy Children to—today he indicated he was at a hospital, and that's just an indication of how hard he works on behalf of the people in his riding. And, of course, I want to thank the member from Welland.

I just want to reiterate, there is so much that the government could have done in order to step up to the plate after five years and decide that they were going to have a plan of action that would have identified, again, the needs of the people in this province, not just for today, but for tomorrow and for 25 years from now. I would personally say to you, I think there is very much a growing concern in the province about the direction of health care, the inability to meet some of the future needs of the population. We're going to have a smaller base of people trying to support a larger base of older people, and the demands for health care and health care spending are going to increase. This government could have done more but they failed to do so.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I will be sharing my time with the member from Welland.

I'm pleased to be speaking today about an issue that affects every Ontarian: access to an adequate supply of health professionals. It has been mentioned that the bill before us, An Act to increase access to qualified health professionals for all Ontarians by amending the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991, is a fairly light bill. You're seeing the whole of it, if you're watching on TV; it's one page. It's really one line. It's almost alarmingly light, because the issue is so important. In the NDP, we think there is much more to be said and much more to be done. But nonetheless, the New Democrats will be supporting Bill 97, as we believe that it is a step in the right direction. It is a step forward. We support this bill in

hope that this is just one of the many steps we want this government to take. The NDP has a proud history in Canada and in this province of leading efforts to improve access to public health care for everyone. We welcome legislation that will improve the effectiveness of our public health care system.

The stated purpose of this bill is to ensure that Ontarians have access to an adequate number of competent health professionals. This bill provides a framework for the government to work with the regulatory colleges to increase access to health professionals. We're talking about the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, the colleges of nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech pathologists, audiologists, optometrists, opticians etc. There are 23 altogether.

On the surface, especially when we know that hundreds of thousands of Ontarians don't have access to primary care, who can argue that this is not needed? There's some good news, because there is action already under way. The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario announced a new policy on September 17 that will streamline the registration process for physicians already practising in other parts of Canada and in the US. When I was the executive director of the community health centre in Sudbury, we needed bilingual physicians. We would get people from Quebec who could practise in both languages, French and English, applying to come and work at our community health centre. They had two, three, five years as family physicians. Some of them actually practised in border communities like Aylmer or Gatineau, and a lot of their clients would actually receive some of their tests and tertiary care in Ontario.

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But those same physicians were not allowed to come and work in Ontario; those same physicians' licences were not recognized in Ontario. They were good enough to practise in Quebec, which has a health care system very similar to ours. They were competent family physicians with licences to practise. They could even order tests and diagnostic procedures in Ontario hospitals. But they were not allowed to have a licence to practise in Ontario. This is about to change, and this is why this bill is a step in the right direction.

This bill will quite likely increase the number of physicians practising in Ontario, and it has to be supported for that. But we need to recognize that this bill will not, on its own, lead to improved access to quality care for those who need it the most. A range of other actions is also needed. We can support this bill, but it is one small part of a comprehensive strategy to improve access to quality care.

There are also a number of important issues that must be discussed as this bill passes through third reading. The first thing I want to talk about is the importance of developing a health human resources strategy to project needs for professionals and to work to ensure that there is an adequate supply of physicians and other providers in the different geographical areas of Ontario.

The title of this bill says "health professionals," but the focus really seems to be on the supply of physicians

and the relationship between the ministry and the College of Physicians and Surgeons. While there is no question that we need to enhance the supply of physicians in Ontario and improve the speed of integration of internationally trained physicians or IMGs—international medical graduates—in Ontario, we cannot simply focus on physicians while ignoring all the other health professionals.

Michael Rachlis, an expert on health care in Canada, recently said that even if the number of physicians were to double, “unless we were to change the structure in which they work, Canadians would still have inadequate access.” So in Ontario, if you look at 23,000 physicians, even if we were to double this, which this bill is nowhere near able to do, we would still have problems of access because we need to change the way family physicians practise primary care.

This means that not only must we think of ways to increase the number of physicians who work in Ontario, but we must also increase the supply of other health professionals. I’m thinking here about nurse practitioners, nurses, registered practical nurses, personal support workers, health promoters, community development workers, social workers, midwives, dietitians, nutritionists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists—the list goes on. Without proper attention to the supply and accessibility of all these health professionals, we cannot expect to see real improvement in Ontario’s health care. Physicians alone, and increasing the number of physicians alone, is not going to make it easier for people to have access to primary care in Ontario.

Second, the NDP is in agreement with groups like the Registered Nurses’ Association of Ontario in cautioning that the recruitment and registration of international medical graduates must be done in an ethical manner. We must not proactively poach physicians from poor countries that have an even greater need for these health professionals than we do. There are good reasons for emigration to Ontario, and we should not and could not prevent people who want to emigrate to Ontario. Ontario has to be a welcoming province to people who want to come here, but we must not go and poach people to bring them here.

The NDP calls on the government to implement ethical international recruitment guidelines, as have been advocated by the RNAO—the Registered Nurses’ Association of Ontario—by the World Health Organization, the International Council of Nurses and the Canadian Policy Research Networks. There are ethical guidelines that can be implemented to make sure that the improved access and recruitment of physicians is not done on the backs of poor countries and developing countries that can least afford it.

While we strongly support strategies to license qualified internationally trained health professionals in Ontario, we also believe that this alone will not solve our health professionals shortage. We need made-in-Ontario solutions that adequately support a broad range of initiatives relating to adequate and accessible medical care.

Third, we must seriously consider the range of actions that are needed to properly accommodate the range of international medical graduates into the Ontario health care system. This bill, as I mentioned, is a tiny step in the right direction. It is vital that the colleges have a concrete role in encouraging an adequate and qualified supply of health professionals, but they are not the only body that must take this issue seriously through the development of concrete and actionable guidelines.

The Office of the Fairness Commissioner touched on this in its submission to Bill 97. The Office of the Fairness Commissioner cautioned, “The government plays a key role in improving access to health care. It is not the responsibility of the ... colleges alone.” The government has a big responsibility to play. We need a ministry that is willing to support, through policy and resources, comprehensive recommendations, including barriers that can be addressed through a legislative or regulatory approach.

We also need educational institutions and professional programs that fully inform students of their programs’ compliance with accreditation and institutions that will work alongside regulatory bodies to ensure this. It is clear that the inclusion of international medical graduates is not an issue that can be solved with only one part of the system taking part. We need the universities on board. We need internship placements. We need support, language training, immigration etc.

Fourth, we need to improve the distribution of physicians, not through coercion, but through recruiting students from rural areas and improving working conditions. The current answer to the question of drawing physicians to underserviced communities functions as a band-aid solution, but as long as physicians do not make a conscious decision that they want to move to northern and rural areas, we will be faced with ongoing shortages.

We need broader changes to solve the problems of too few physicians in Ontario who wish to practise in underserviced communities. For example, fewer doctors want to or are willing to work 70 hours a week. More and more physicians have spouses who also work and want to be active parents. We need to find models of care that respect this work-life balance.

Certainly, the creation of the northern Ontario medical school is a step in the right direction. They recruit from northern and rural areas. They train and make sure that all of their students are exposed to practising family medicine in northern and rural areas. Right now, all 56 of them in the third year of their training spend the entire year either on a First Nations reserve or in a remote or northern community. This exposure prepares them for what’s coming ahead when they’re ready to go and practise. The Northern Ontario School of Medicine is the only one that affords that kind of training to their students.

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We also need to find models of care that respect the work-life balance. Right now, a lot of physicians practising in underserviced areas work long hours. It is not a practice that is very desirable for most new graduates.

We need more community health centres in northern, rural and underserved communities. These allow new graduates or any other physicians to practise medicine. We know that in northern, rural and remote communities the retention and recruitment issues will continue to be there for times to come, but in a community health centre, if a physician or a nurse practitioner leaves, the chart stays in the community. It stays in the community health centre. The other members of the team who know the client are still there to help them along. There is also a body, the administration of the community health centre, that is there to put on recruitment efforts to make sure that new physicians, nurse practitioners, dietitians, social workers, health promoters and community development workers can be recruited so that the team can be whole again and provide quality care to their clients. It is good for the community, it is good for the patients of the community health centre, and it is also very good for the providers who work in those settings. They get to practise medicine. They get to work within the full scope of nurse practitioners. They get to work as nutritionists and work as part of a team. More and more, best practice for dealing with chronic disease, more and more, best practice for dealing with most of the common elements of primary care, is better done in a group setting, called an interdisciplinary team, where all of the different providers work together to provide quality care.

We need those kinds of models in order to be able to recruit in northern, remote and rural communities and underserved communities of Ontario. I must also say that there are pockets of populations, even if they are in the centres that have good access to many primary care practitioners, whether physicians or others, who have problems of access for different reasons.

Fifth, we need to make sure that physicians are doing what they do best, and that other providers such as nurse practitioners take their rightful place on health care teams. We need to recognize that physicians are not the only health professionals lacking in our current system. There's an example that is given as a joke, but unfortunately it often rings true: If you try to gain access to a midwife, you need to sign up on the night of conception; otherwise, the waiting list is so long, chances are you won't have a midwife helping you through your pregnancy and delivery.

While we have increased the number of seats in medical schools, we have lagged behind in training nurses. Ontario has the second-lowest number of nurses per capita in Canada. Yet, in spite of this existing shortage, the McGuinty government announced last month that it has delayed the hiring of 9,000 nurses that was promised in the last election. This is on top of the hundreds of nurses recently laid off from different hospitals in this province. The hypocrisy of advocating support for one sector of health care while simultaneously pulling the carpet out from under an equally important group of practitioners is not lost on this party or on the people of Ontario.

The sixth point I wanted to make: We need to better understand the needs of Ontarians who are currently

without access to primary care. We read different reports, going from a million Ontarians, 750,000 Ontarians without access, half a million Ontarians actively looking for access to primary care, for a family physician or a nurse practitioner. But what do we know about these people? Well, we know that many live in rural areas where there is no other access to primary care. We know that many of those half a million people actively looking for access to primary care are immigrants, people with different cultural backgrounds who can't access a physician and who are often uncomfortable with a physician of a different sex, for example.

There are also lots of marginalized people, low-income people, homeless people, people who are transient and are unable to establish and maintain a relationship with a single physician. We often say that people who have lived on the streets develop coping mechanisms that make it really hard for them to establish a relationship. In order to survive on the street, they have developed those coping mechanisms that then make it very hard to access the system the way it is rolled out right now. Other people who are actively seeking access to primary care are people who are usually healthy, who don't regularly go to see a physician, but suddenly get sick. They are left having to attend the emergency room, which does not provide a level of primary care that is acceptable to anybody with a chronic condition.

We need to aggressively pursue models of delivery that will increase access to marginalized groups, because they form such a big proportion of people seeking access to primary care. Indeed, if we are concerned about access to care by all groups and quality of care for all people, we need to remember that community health centres, which involve genuine partnership between physicians and a range of other health care professionals, are best at providing quality care to hard-to-reach populations, whether it be population in rural or remote areas, recent immigrants, low-income people or homeless people. I also include in this aboriginal health access centres that specialize in providing access to First Nations communities. Why isn't this government moving more quickly to increase the scope of practice and responsibility of allied health professionals such as nurses, nurse practitioners, opticians, dental hygienists etc.?

In Ontario, we have about 23,000 physicians, but we only have 800 licensed nurse practitioners. I'll let you do the math. If we are serious about improving quality of care, access to care and affordability of care, why aren't we radically increasing the supply of other health professionals—nurse practitioners, health promoters, community development workers, social workers, nutritionists and midwives? Why are we making such slow progress building new community health centres, a New Democrat innovation that provides the gold standard in primary care?

There were quite a few new community health centres announced, but they are being rolled out very, very slowly. The announcements are now three years old, but very few new community health centres are actually up and running with permanent locations, with a full team of

interdisciplinary professionals and with actual operating budgets and capital budgets to be able to function as a full-fledged community health centre.

The same thing is true with aboriginal health access centres. Aboriginal health access centres have had difficulty in recruiting and retaining physicians, nurse practitioners and other members of the interdisciplinary team because their salaries have not kept pace with other primary care models. They are what we call second-class citizens in trying to recruit and retain, because their budgets have not kept pace. They end up recruiting for often difficult practices in remote locations with fewer resources than their cousins.

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There was also, in October of this year, the postponement of 50 new family health teams. Community family health teams provide good interdisciplinary care to Ontarians. They are among the new models of primary care that are well equipped to deal with best practice in managing chronic disease, but in this mini-fiscal announcement that was made by the Minister of Finance in October—they promised during the campaign 50 new family health teams. Well, we're not going to see them in the next year. We're not going to see the 9,000 new nursing positions that had been promised. Those are all steps going backward. If we're serious about increasing access, then we must be serious in providing those primary care resources, such as family health teams and those nurses to provide the care, that will improve access.

Finally, we need to focus our attention on disease prevention and promoting good health practices. That means creating communities with resources for good health that have recreational centres, child care, education, community involvement and a clean environment.

The health care system is important to help people once they become sick, but what helps to keep people healthy is work on the determinants of health. The determinants of health fall, most of the time, outside the health care system, but this is what keeps us healthy. Investment in health promotion, disease prevention and the social determinants of health, the main one being poverty, goes a long way toward decreasing the need for medical and health services down the road.

We are still waiting for the government's anti-poverty strategy. That alone—tackling poverty—would have a very big impact on the need for health services down the road, but we are still waiting for this. We are falling behind other provinces in implementing social and economic policies that improve and protect health in the first place. Why don't we have a high-level government committee assessing the health impact of our social and economic strategy, very much like they're presently doing in Saskatchewan, so that you can really have an impact on the social determinants of health, which will have a direct impact on the need for health care services? If we can get people to have healthy food, healthy body weights, not pick up smoking and have the opportunity to exercise, we will have a much healthier population. We would see a dramatic decrease in most chronic diseases,

including cancer, high blood pressure, asthma, diabetes, and the list goes on.

The government has lever policies that they can do to improve the social determinants of the health of Ontarians but they're not using them. Ontarians want the opportunity and support to live healthy and productive lives. If they get sick, they want timely access to good-quality and effective health care. As politicians, we have a duty to strive for a health care system that first aims to keep people healthy and, second, provides good care when people are sick at an affordable and sustainable cost.

Mr. Steven Lewis, the director of research with the Romanow commission, has said, "We had focused more on ramping up volume, rather than improving quality of care and health outcomes." More is often assumed by government to be better. The McGuinty government certainly has adopted the mantra of "More is better": more spending—a 55% increase in spending over the last seven years; more doctors—twice as many new doctors certified in 2007 than we had in 1997; more procedures—20% more MRI exams over the last two years.

Meanwhile, recent reports indicate that the government has only made modest improvements in reducing wait times, improving quality of care and improving health outcomes.

The most recent Ontario Health Quality Council report indicates that wait times for cancer surgery, hip and knee replacements, and CT scans have been reduced, but cardiac bypass, MRI and emergency room care wait times have not changed. They have actually gotten worse.

Quality of care has also not improved much. Patient satisfaction rates with acute care and emergency department care have not improved. The June report from the Change Foundation found that two in five Ontarians did not have access to the information they need and did not feel their time was valued. One in two Ontarians are not sure who is leading their care. A 2007 Conference Board report found that Ontario has the second-worst satisfaction rates for hospital care and the lowest satisfaction rates among women for community care of all of the provinces in Canada. We're second last or dead last.

In terms of medical outcomes, death rates from heart attacks, childhood asthma, and diabetes have persisted.

And our health care system is clearly not doing well in reducing risk factors for illness. Smoking rates, the government said, have fallen slightly, but I would say that if you add to this the number of contraband cigarettes sold in Ontario, then the number of smokers is actually higher and the percentage of those who smoke more is actually higher. So to send out there that the smoke-free Ontario strategy is working—it has worked somewhat, but new strategies are needed for the new reality of Ontario.

Far too many adults are overweight or obese, do not exercise and have poor diets. This is also happening with children, where one in four Ontario kids are actually overweight. That does not bode well. We're starting to see diseases like high blood pressure in kids who are 16 and 17 years old. We see strokes in kids who are 18 and

19 years old. We've never had that before in Ontario. We see more and more of this because one in four children in Ontario are obese. This is not acceptable.

In fact, eight of every 10 Canadians have at least one risk factor for stroke or heart disease. Diabetes and asthma are both on the rise. Eighty per cent of Canadians over the age of 65 have at least one chronic condition.

The burden of illness and disease is not distributed equally. Low-income people and First Nations people bear the brunt of poor health. Remember, I was talking to you about the social determinants of health. The number one social determinant of health is poverty. The rate of good health is directly linked to income. The poorer you are, the greater the chances you will be sick, that you will use hospital services, that you will use health care services, and for a longer period of time. As soon as the level of income increases—and you don't need a very big increase—it has a direct impact. The more it increases, the healthier the population gets. When we advocate for a \$10.25-an-hour minimum wage, we're actually advocating for healthier Ontarians, because as revenue increases, so does their health.

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The 2007 Conference Board of Canada report ranked the Ontario health care system fifth out of the 10 provinces in Canada. We are in the middle of the pack. To me, middle of the pack is not good enough, especially when the same report ranks Canada's system as a whole 11 out of 24 countries. There is room for improvement.

In sum, our health care system is not doing as well as it could. This bill, as has been mentioned, is a tiny, wee step in the right direction, but we have to realize that it is a very small one. The New Democrats, as well as many stakeholders who spoke to this bill, believe that this is an important but very minimal step forward for an issue that requires much, much more work. We can and should work to increase the supply of physicians, but let's not pretend that this alone will solve the problem of lack of access to health care, or radically improve the quality of care, or ensure the financial sustainability of our health care system, because it won't. Much more needs to be done for this.

The New Democrats will support this bill for what it is—a small step—but we have much bigger expectations.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mario Sergio: I'm pleased to add a couple of comments, not only on the last speaker, the member from Nickel Belt, but as well the previous speaker, the member from Kitchener-Waterloo. I have to say that one of the advantages of being in opposition is that they have half an hour, 40 minutes, one hour, and they are capable of bringing much more detail to the floor of the House in discussion on the various bills. If anyone has been listening to the presentation by the member from Nickel Belt, it showed the extreme need to bring better health to our communities, from north to south, to the rich and to the poor, to the young and the old and the First Nation's people. Who can disagree with that? I think she did a

wonderful job in bringing to the floor of the House the many reasons why we need to do this. It's taking some time, yes, but it has taken 17 years, 17 years since the act of 1991, I believe, to bring some changes. Changes are needed. Someone may say that this is a very light bill—one page. Let me reiterate that having heard the member from Nickel Belt, there is such heavy content in the bill that I think it begs for the House to move on quickly in approving this particular bill. Who can disagree with the needs that are out there? I know in my particular community, because I have a very needy community—and I have been promoting a new medical school at York University for that matter. But it's taking a long time to get a doctor, to get a nurse, to that particular stage. It doesn't happen overnight. With respect to access to the profession by foreign professionals, I totally agree that it's a huge need and I think we should do everything that we can.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I think the member from Nickel Belt is very qualified to make comments on this particular bill. During question period, she is well informed, having worked in the health care system, and she brings some credibility—much like the member from Kitchener-Waterloo, as the prior Minister of Health, knows of what she speaks.

Now, we all made a point of this small, one-page bill. In fact, it should be on the record that it's not a page; it's half a page. The member from Kitchener-Waterloo pointed out that it actually changes one line and that it does nothing to increase the number of physicians. It talks about standards; we agree with that. They're making a big to-do about this legislation here that changes precisely two words, if you look at the act it's changing. It amends schedule 2 of the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991, by adding the following sections—which I have read before, and the member from Kitchener-Waterloo as well as the member from Nickel Belt referred to it.

What I would like to see is substantive, measurable targets. Are we going to have more doctors? Here's the deal: They could look at other health care providers. They could look at the role of nurse practitioners. They could look at the report by the ONA on primary health reform. There are some real instructive and intelligent things that the government could do, but what they've done is offered us up to speak for hours on a bill that's really changing about two words. It's unimaginable.

The new pages are here, and I'm sure if they knew how much time would be spent to change a couple of words, they'd be shocked and saddened.

Let's get on with it, because the biggest single issue I hear is there aren't enough doctors in Ontario. We started the northern medical school when Elizabeth Witmer was the Minister of Health. Let's get on with the job; it's a problem you haven't solved.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Kormos: It was a delight to listen to my colleague the health critic for the NDP, the member for

Nickel Belt. As I told folks before she got the floor, she's going to provide some interesting and meaningful insights into this whole issue.

Look, Ms. Gélinas, the member for Nickel Belt, is a woman with great generosity of spirit, and she is being more kind than she ought to be by calling this a step. She says it's a tiny step. A step? This is nothing. This is vapour. This is wind. It's like quicksilver; it's elusive. And I'm going to have a chance to speak to it in a very short while.

Let's understand that somehow this government wants people to believe that this is a policy that's going to enhance the access of Ontarians to health professions, be they physicians, nurses, dieticians, as Ms. Gélinas speaks of, dental hygienists, physiotherapists, social workers, psychologists.

The Premier talked earlier today about creating fictions. And it's a pretty feckless effort at the end of the day, the government trying to create a fiction, somehow suggesting that this is a policy. This isn't a policy; this is silliness. I'm looking forward to my 20 minutes on this in short order.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I'm pleased to comment on the comments made by the member for Nickel Belt, who, as someone who has been active in the health care management field, understands the roles that regulatory bodies play in disallowing entry or allowing entry into the profession.

But I think it's important sometimes to bring to the floor of this Legislature the voices of those who really know this issue first-hand, and I want to provide those in the House with a few excerpts from correspondence from the Association of International Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, which was received before the committee:

"The Association of International Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (AIPSO) is a non profit organization consisting of internationally trained medical doctors. AIPSO has been involved in advocating for well qualified IMDs to have a fair and transparent way to licensure to practise medicine in Ontario since 1999.

"AIPSO does not advocate the registration of doctors who may not have been sufficiently trained but is passionate in advocating for competent and well trained doctors who are continually being denied an opportunity to serve the communities in which they live, work and pay taxes to....

"AIPSO believes that this Bill 97 is a good first step to ensure that the CPSO, in addition to its other noble duties, also addresses the issues of why well qualified IMDs who are already living here in Canada, and who have passed equivalent exams and have relevant foreign experience, are unable to be licensed to work in Canada....

"AIPSO offers its full support for Bill 97."

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I know that those individuals who are active in AIPSO have long been advocates for their community of internationally trained physicians, and they were advocates

long before anybody in a role of governance in this Legislature was listening to them and looking to make changes. Bill 97 is an important step, a step that lays foundational change, and I'm pleased that groups like AIPSO are supporting it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: This is a very important piece of legislation—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I'm sorry. I believe we have already had four. I was looking to the table, and they confirm that we've already had four questions and comments.

The member for Nickel Belt for a response.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'd like to thank the member from York West for his comments. I certainly agree with him that the need for health care services in Ontario is huge, that the best way to tackle the need is to decrease it and that the way to do this is to invest in the social determinants of health so that we take concrete steps to keeping the population of Ontario healthy and in their own homes longer. Certainly I agree with your comments.

To the member from Durham, yes, it is a small bill; I think everybody will agree. No matter how you fold it, it's still going to be a small bill. Nevertheless, I agree with your comment that we need primary health care reform in Ontario. The government introduced a new model of primary care with the family health teams. It is certainly very regrettable that the 50 new family health teams that were announced during the election are actually being postponed for a year.

I salute the member of the NDP caucus from Welland, who will also have a chance to speak about this bill and share his views on it.

Lastly, I'd like to thank the member from Etobicoke-Lakeshore for the report she wrote and the bill she brought forward. There are quite a few IMGs, or international medical graduates, in Ontario who have had a really tough time passing the barriers of their college. This bill will make it a little bit easier—the same thing for family physicians from Quebec who could not practise in Ontario because they only had one year of internship, etc. There is one barrier, but there are still very many that remain.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I am pleased to rise and speak in support of Bill 97, entitled Increasing Access to Qualified Health Professionals for Ontario. This bill amends the Regulated Health Professions Act, and I think it is worthwhile talking a little bit about how that works.

There are a number of independent, self-governing health professional colleges in Ontario, and this is the umbrella act that addresses all those regulated health professions: doctors, nurses, nurse practitioners, dentists, dental technicians—a whole host of people who are involved in our health care. Each of those independent, self-governing colleges has its own legislation, but this is the umbrella legislation that broadly lays out what each of them is to do. Within the responsibility of each of

these health professions is the ability to decide who can register in that profession, who is qualified to practise. In other words, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario decides who can be a doctor in Ontario within the framework laid out in this act.

What this act says is that among the duties of all the colleges, but particularly within the duties of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the college will have a duty "to work in consultation with the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to ensure, as a matter of public interest, that the people of Ontario have access to adequate numbers of qualified, skilled and competent regulated health professionals." The important part there is "access to adequate numbers." They've always been responsible for making sure that the people are qualified, that they are skilled, but they were never required to look at, do we have enough people in Ontario to be doctors, to be nurses, to be nurse practitioners? They never were responsible for thinking about, are there enough doctors in Ontario?

Unfortunately, over the years, what has happened with the College of Physicians and Surgeons is that they've had some very odd barriers to practising in Ontario, despite the fact that, clearly, we've had a persistent shortage of doctors in Ontario ever since the days when the NDP government cut the number of residencies; in other words, the number of training spots for doctors in Ontario.

Although it is, in fact, a very short bill, this is actually a very significant bill, because for the first time ever, the Ontario College of Physicians and Surgeons will be responsible for thinking, as they look at people coming in and wanting to practise in Ontario, are there enough doctors in Ontario to meet the needs of patients in Ontario?

To give you some examples of why this actually is a significant piece of legislation, I was absolutely astounded, when I became an MPP and started to talk to people, to find out that if you qualified to be a doctor in another province of Canada, you couldn't be a doctor in Ontario. You could qualify at the McGill school of medicine to be a doctor, but you weren't allowed to practise in Ontario. You could qualify at the Dalhousie medical school to be a doctor, but you weren't allowed to be a doctor in Ontario. You also weren't allowed to be a doctor if you qualified in the schools of medicine in the United States. For example, you could qualify to be a doctor at the Harvard medical school, a school with a stellar international reputation, but the College of Physicians and Surgeons in Ontario wouldn't let you be a doctor in Ontario.

So the barriers that we have thrown up in Ontario aren't just those that we often think about, in terms of people who have, perhaps, qualified in Asia or in Africa or in South America. You couldn't even get to be a doctor in Ontario if you qualified in another Canadian province or in the United States. That's what this bill is addressing. It's saying to the College of Physicians and Surgeons, "Come on, folks. You really need to look at,

do we have enough doctors in Ontario? And what are reasonable barriers and what are unreasonable barriers?"

I'm very pleased to report that since this bill was introduced, we have made some significant progress with the College of Physicians and Surgeons. On September 18, 2008, the College of Physicians and Surgeons agreed that they would change their registration policies to make it possible for physicians licensed in other parts of Canada and the United States to more easily become registered to practise in Ontario. If doctors have qualified in other Canadian provinces, if they've qualified in the US, they will now be able to register in Ontario if they have completed the US postgraduate training and examinations or, quite frankly, the Canadian postgraduate and exams that are exactly the same, virtually, as what Ontario graduates are doing anyway.

With this piece of legislation that says for the first time to the College of Physicians and Surgeons, "Think about whether or not we actually have enough doctors in Ontario," we've got the door opening up to people who have qualified all over Canada and the US. That's an absolute first. The astounding thing—my husband happens to be a large-animal veterinarian and has been involved with registration for veterinarians; that was already the situation for veterinarians, that if you qualified anywhere in Canada, if you qualified at any accredited veterinary college in the US—they figured it out years ago—that should be a North American accreditation. Finally we've got the same situation with human doctors that we've had for a very long time with veterinary doctors. So this actually is a very big step forward.

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But I wouldn't want the audience to think that this is the only thing that we're doing, because we understand that this is only one piece of the puzzle. We have already been addressing other pieces of the puzzle in terms of making sure that we have more doctors in Ontario. In fact, there are 1,253 more doctors in Ontario than when we took office in 2003. We've completed a 23% expansion of medical school capacity this year. We're planning on adding 100 more first-year medical school spaces, which will be overall a 37% increase of our capacity here in Ontario to train doctors.

A number of people have opened the new medical school in northern Ontario, in Thunder Bay, which opened in 2005, and that's one of the things that we have done. Another thing that we've done that is quite exciting is we have set up satellite campuses in some of our medium-sized cities for medical schools that already exist. So we actually have four new medical campuses in southern Ontario at Mississauga, St. Catharines, Kitchener-Waterloo and Windsor. The one, of course, being in Guelph, that I am particularly interested in is the one that's in Kitchener-Waterloo, which has already opened and is already training medical students. What's exciting about that is that not only is it simply a new medical campus attached to the University of Waterloo; it's also—because it is training family doctors—involving the hospitals within the Wellington-Waterloo LHIN in training those new doctors. So each of the hospitals

within the Wellington-Waterloo LHIN has some sort of role in training those new doctors.

For example, Guelph General Hospital is responsible for the rotation in internal medicine. The Homewood psychiatric hospital is responsible for the rotation in psychiatry. St. Joseph's hospital in Guelph specializes in complex and continuing care, so they will be working with the training in that area and in geriatric care. It's actually quite an exciting program involving all the hospitals in the Wellington-Waterloo LHIN in the training and will hopefully, down the road, have an impact on attracting doctors to the Wellington-Waterloo area because of the fact that they've had experience in all the hospitals in our region during their training, and this will be a much more attractive place for them to come to set up practice because they already know us well.

We've also created 150 new family health teams since we took office in 2003, which has had a huge impact on the number of people who now have a family doctor. I know in Guelph, with the creation of family health teams, that it has had a significant impact. One of the ways in which it has had a significant impact is that young medical graduates who are coming out with a designation in family practice are really quite excited about practising in the family practice model, where you have not just the doctor standing alone, but where you have significant support from nurse practitioners, from dieticians, from social workers, so there's a real medical team looking at being able to serve those patients. Young doctors are saying that this is a really exciting model. So those communities that are lucky enough to have family health teams are finding that it's much easier to attract new doctors to their community, and in fact that has been just the case in Guelph. For the first time in years, with new doctors joining our family health teams, we're approaching that level where we're almost fully serviced. That's really exciting.

It's interesting that in the agreement that the Ministry of Health has just signed with the Ontario Medical Association, there will be incentives for those family physicians in family health teams to take on additional patients, because what we are finding with that team approach to medicine, getting the nurse practitioners and the others on the team involved, is that those family doctors can take care of even more patients because they have those additional supports. So we're also expecting that the existing family health teams will be able to care for even more patients.

I'm very pleased that we've had this significant turnaround, with this piece of legislation, in getting all the regulated health professions to acknowledge that it is part of their duty—in fact, we are legislating that it will be part of their duty—to make sure that there is an adequate number of doctors, nurses, whatever the case may be, in looking at their registration and qualification practices, and I'm pleased that it is already having an impact in the way that those colleges are behaving.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's a pleasure to be able to contribute to today's debate on Bill 97. This has been a very pressing issue in my community because it's a fast-growing community with many new Canadians who come to Canada, or, specifically, to the province of Ontario, to be able to work and live a very meaningful life as good citizens, and when they arrive, they realize that some of their credentials, particularly those in the medical community, are not transferable here in our province.

That's quite disappointing, because everybody wants to contribute to their community. It leads to many of our new Canadians and to some of my constituents being underemployed. It's strange that they would be underemployed, because we need them so much; we need them because we have physician shortages in our communities, particularly—as I like to say, I've got the double edge: a high-growth community on one end where there are new families moving into a new area which used to be farmland, and this new location requires them to have a family physician, and the other area is rural. We all know the challenges that rural Ontarians face with doctor shortages.

Our critic from Kitchener-Waterloo has indicated we will support this bill. We are disappointed, however, that it doesn't go very far, because it is only one sentence.

We had proposed, in the official opposition, to create a new school of medicine and expand medical school spaces. We committed to implementing a comprehensive long-term physician recruitment strategy and establishing an independent human resource planning body for health care professionals. But today, in this Legislature, we must impress upon the government the importance of working with our international medical graduates and ensuring that they are actually in the workforce doing what they are trained to do, which is saving lives and looking after people.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It's my pleasure to add a few comments to those of the member from Guelph. Certainly she talks about the importance of not just looking at physicians but also looking at other members of the interdisciplinary team. Whether we talk about nurse practitioners, nurses, dieticians, chiropractors etc., those people need a place to work as a team, and those places to work as a team are either aboriginal health access centres, community health centres or family health teams. Even in family health teams, if you look at the percentage, they are mainly focused on family physicians.

So if this government is serious that they want an interdisciplinary team, that they want to bring increased access to primary care to the people of Ontario, then they shouldn't postpone the resources going toward the 50 new family health teams. At their basis, they are a primary health care model that works under the interdisciplinary team, and they were certainly well poised to bring better access, but this has been delayed.

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Today I asked the Minister of Health about home care. Home care is having serious retention and recruitment

issues for a number of reasons. Those 9,000 nursing positions that, again, have been postponed for a year would have gone a long way toward improving recruitment and retention in the home care sector. Because the home care sector is in such turmoil right now and is not providing the type of care needed by the residents of Ontario, those residents often end up in hospital and they end up being labelled alternate-level-of-care; that is, they don't need hospital care, but they have nowhere else to go. If you ask each and every one of them, they want to go home.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm very pleased to speak about international medical graduates. It's one of the issues that is very important in Ottawa. I've talked to the Catholic immigration services, and they have a person who is in charge of a list of the international medical graduates who haven't found a place within our system. It's over 500 just for the city of Ottawa, and they say it's not an inclusive list. So I think that they will be pleased that this legislation is moving forward and that there is real progress on how these very important people to our health care system can move through the system and become our doctors in our neighbourhoods.

My own doctor on Bay Street here has a young graduate from Iran who is working in his practice, and I've spoken to him about it and to the young doctor, and they're both very pleased that there is movement forward for this.

In Orléans, we have a lot of orphan patients, and we know that the solution is partly in moving these people through the system.

I really congratulate Laurel Broten for the work that she did in bringing that report forward and getting us closer to having a system which makes sure that these people can move forward, that they're not being held back by regulations etc., that the path is clear, and that there's a provision in this process to check out areas where we're not getting the success we should be with these doctors moving into the system.

The need is great in our province. The need is great in the Ottawa area, where many of these doctors have ended up.

I look forward to this legislation going through and to what we heard today: that it is going to be successful in getting more of these people active in our communities, giving us health care.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Kormos: I'll have the pleasure of being able to address this, albeit for but 20 minutes. Because of the time, it's almost inevitably going to mean, unless the Speaker ignores the clock and lets me do my 20 minutes in a complete segment—and the Speaker is welcome to do that. But I'm going to have a chance to address this in but a few minutes' time.

I say, hooley. I have regard for the valiant effort of the member for Guelph. But if the government wanted to tell colleges that it was their responsibility to ensure that

there was mentoring, to ensure that there was fairness around assessment of foreign credentials, to ensure that there were tutoring programs and profession-specific English-as-a-second-language programs, then it could have said so, couldn't it have? It could have been very clear and very specific. On the contrary, the government says nothing. It says the colleges have a duty, but then there's no remedy for anybody in the event that the college doesn't fulfill that duty—a so-called right without a remedy, which means it's no right at all.

The question to be asked is, what the heck were the colleges doing until this bill appeared? They weren't acting in the public interest—is that what the government is saying? Because if they weren't, then we should be rewriting the legislation that deals with colleges.

This clearly is an effort on the part of the McGuinty government to avoid the issue, to hide from it and to obfuscate rather than address it, notwithstanding all of the hollow promises.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The member for Guelph for a response.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Thank you to the members from Welland, Nepean–Carleton, Ottawa–Orléans and Nickel Belt for their comments. I note that both of the Ottawa area members have been emphasizing the challenges that occur, when a community is growing rapidly, in attracting sufficient doctors, and also the important role that international medical graduates could play if we can only manage to make sure that more of them have access to being qualified in Canada.

I note that the member from Nickel Belt talked about the very important role of interdisciplinary health models. We certainly agree with her that those models are very important, which is in fact why we did introduce 150 family health teams and, I would add, expanded the community health centres, which are also an interdisciplinary model, so that there are 49 additional community health centres since we took office.

I think it's important to recognize that this is just one step. If we look at foreign-trained doctors, I think we need to note for the record that we have more than doubled the number of spaces for international medical graduates, from 90 to 200 spaces each year, to make sure that they can be qualified in Ontario. This past year, the 2007-08 year, which is the last year for which we have numbers, we surpassed our own target of 200 and actually offered 235 positions to international medical graduates. When we look at that cumulative record, today in Ontario there are approximately 630 internationally educated doctors who are in residency and who will qualify to practise in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I rise in the House today to share my abject disappointment with Bill 97, An Act to increase access to qualified health professionals for all Ontarians by amending the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991. That's the long title; the short title is an act to download the doctor shortage onto somebody else. The "somebody else" in this case is the 23 regulatory bodies

of the College of Physicians and Surgeons across Ontario.

This is not the first download of physician shortage by the McGuinty government. Bill 97 constitutes the second official download of this government's responsibility to address the doctor shortage. The first download was not directed, no; rather, it occurred out of sheer desperation and necessity. I'm referring to communities across this great province that are battling it out in bare-knuckle fights for a handful of physicians. Health care is a provincial responsibility, and yet the budgets of our municipalities have line items for things like physician recruiters or incentive packages for doctors who will establish practices in their communities. Some communities have gone to the expense of producing slick sales videos to sell their location as the best. Others are offering everything from gym memberships to free office space. One community in fact has leased and furnished a medical office, including medical equipment, so a doctor could just walk in and set up shop. These are valuable community resources being expended to resolve provincial issues—an issue that Premier McGuinty has campaigned on in two separate elections.

Premier McGuinty should be ashamed of himself. He brought in the single largest tax increase in the history of our province, the so-called health premium, which is really a tax, and then has repeatedly refused to address the critical issues facing our health care system.

We are facing an aging population; I'm one of those. As we age, our health care needs become increasingly complex, and a family doctor is the key piece to our medical puzzle. The family doctor is the keeper of the patient's history. They know their patient and can detect a pattern or identify health issues that would be difficult to find in a piecemeal fashion and critical time lapses while the file is being reconstructed.

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The doctor shortage is nothing new in our province. I would like to remind the members opposite that it was the PC government that took the reins and addressed this doctor shortage. We did so because another Liberal, Bob Rae, capped the number of physicians permitted to practise in Ontario. The Bob Rae legacy continues to impact our health care system every single day to today. The reality is that we lost hundreds of doctors who would be practising here today, and it was a PC government that was successful in reversing that destructive policy.

The difference between what the McGuinty government is doing now and what we as a PC government did back then is blatantly obvious. The PCs practised leadership. We did not leave the doctor shortage to chance. We did not hope and pray that our municipal partners would pick up our slack and start their own recruiting drive, nor did we download the responsibility to the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario. What we did was, we led. We created policy. Then we made sure that that policy was working.

The lure of big salaries from the United States and elsewhere in the world is very attractive. We must take

action now—we have no time to lose—to avoid a massive drain on our health care human resources across the board, not just physicians but all health care practitioners.

Five years ago, Premier McGuinty promised to recruit and train more doctors. Five years ago, the Premier promised that no person would go without the medical attention they needed. Well, Premier, five years of inaction have passed, and the dismal record of your government is that we still have over a million Ontarians without a family doctor. Ontarians aren't getting any younger. In fact, our health care needs are growing more, and they're growing more complex. The taxpayers of this province, those same folks the Premier has burdened with his health tax, are getting older and need a family doctor now. Our seniors are being forced into walk-in clinics where their weakened immune systems are susceptible to every germ on the laden surfaces. The walk-in clinics have excellent staff, but they are only seeing a brief snapshot of that patient's medical history. They do not have the benefit of working through the personal medical records that the patient should have available to them.

The fabulous e-health initiative that the Premier promised is also nowhere to be seen. So our seniors do not even have the benefit of electronic records to simplify the process and assist in a more complete diagnosis. If our seniors are lucky enough to have a family doctor, many of them are only permitted to discuss one ailment per visit—shocking. This is the result of overworked, understaffed medical professionals whose patient roster is bursting, and they have implemented this new policy to offset their packed waiting rooms.

Our seniors and families deserve better. They have worked hard. They are paying their taxes, and now they should be confident to at least have timely access to a health care system.

Bill 97 is not that plan. It is merely moving the problem onto somebody else's plate. It is beyond comprehension how you can even bring this piece of legislation forward, as it is more of an abdication of duty than it actually is a plan.

Our party has a plan. PCs always have a plan. This is one of the fundamental differences that separate us. We are a party of action, and the members opposite just love that photo op. Our party would implement the following initiatives to ensure that there is an adequate supply of physicians in Ontario.

First, we would create a new school of medicine and expand existing medical school places. This would build on the initiative we started while in government to reverse the effects of the Bob Rae doctor caps.

Secondly, we would implement a comprehensive, long-term physician recruitment strategy. There are three key words in that initiative that are foreign to the Liberal members opposite. First is "comprehensive," second is "long-term," and the third is "strategy." The Premier's policies usually run to the short-range, stopgap, photo-op variety and in the end do not resolve the root cause of the issue.

Lastly, we would establish an independent human resource planning body for health care professionals. This action would support and empower physician networks that already exist to reach even further and attract more physicians to our province. We're all aware of the international medical graduates who are not currently practising in their field. We are aware because they are calling our constituency offices, wanting to know what they can do. They're desperate: Where can they go, and why is our system in such a mess? These international medical graduates have uprooted their families and left their homeland for the promise of a better life, but also because they have heard that we need doctors. And we do need doctors, but the red carpet that we rolled out to them via the Internet in our efforts to woo them is pulled right out from under them when they get here. They have budgeted for a few years of start-up fees. Those few years quickly turn into 10 or more, and then they're struggling to support their families while all around them they keep listening to our ongoing moan of "doctor shortage, doctor shortage." It's difficult to comprehend.

My heart has gone out to a local family in just such a situation. This woman is an internationally trained medical graduate who wants to practise here in Ontario. She's in great demand, in fact. She has done everything asked of her. She has passed all of the recertification, the residency phase; she is ready to complete the last phase of her transition to Canadian medicine. The competition for a residency position is fierce, as they are few and far between. Luckily, she was informed that a residency position was imminently hers. In the blink of an eye, this dedicated future doctor was then informed that the residency position disappeared. Yes, mistakes happen, but this is about somebody's career. This is about our province's future. Where did that position go? Well, no one has any answers, not the College of Physicians and Surgeons and certainly not the McGuinty government.

Now we are asked to trust in this dysfunctional system, one that will now have sole responsibility for addressing the doctor shortage in the province of Ontario. The McGuinty government is guilty of this in every ministry. The government is not allocating their resources wisely. If you want to increase the number of doctors practising medicine, you need not only to ensure that our

medical schools have enough spaces, but you then have to have enough residency spaces for them to complete their training and get their doctor's licence. One follows the other.

Why are we playing these games with our health care practitioners? People want to practise medicine here in our great province and have made significant sacrifices to do so. There is a major disconnect between the McGuinty government rhetoric and the actual work being done behind the scenes. I liken it to the great and powerful Wizard of Oz: lots of bluster and big talk, but at the end of the day it was one man pulling the strings, pushing the buttons, behind the curtain. That's what we have here: the great, powerful McGuinty pushing buttons, pulling strings, with the taxpayers of Ontario.

If this were a real bill, there would be at least one mention of foreign-trained doctors or international medical graduates. How can you expand the number of doctors practising in Ontario if you do not include international medical graduates? We have a finite number of medical graduates here in the province. Combine that with the lure of the United States and the big salary, and we have an even smaller pool of home-grown graduates to choose from. I wonder if the Premier can resolve a doctor shortage without utilizing every resource at his disposal. Is this the Liberal way: big talk, no plan, no action? Where's the government's 10-year strategic health plan that was supposed to be released in the spring of 2007? Until we have a plan, we're not going to be able to identify our needs. How can we address them? It was already challenging enough to recruit doctors to practise in Ontario when we were the shining star of Confederation and the economic engine that drove this country. Now that Premier McGuinty has driven our economy into the ground, I just—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I'll ask the member to please take her seat.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): It being 6 o'clock, I declare this House adjourned, to be back in session tomorrow morning, November 18, at 9 o'clock.

The House adjourned at 1800.

ERRATUM

No.	Page	Column	Line(s)	Should read:
74	3280	1	45	Rosemary Sadlier, who is the president of the Ontario

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Tuesday 18 November 2008

Mardi 18 novembre 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 18 November 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 18 novembre 2008

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the non-denominational prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PHOTO CARD ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LES CARTES-PHOTO

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 6, 2008, on the motion for third reading of Bill 85, An Act to permit the issuance of photo cards to residents of Ontario and to make complementary amendments to the Highway Traffic Act/ Projet de loi 85, Loi permettant la délivrance de cartes-photo aux résidents de l'Ontario et apportant des modifications complémentaires au Code de la route.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate? The member from Toronto–Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'm surprised the others aren't speaking, but I'll take advantage of the opportunity.

We New Democrats support the creation of a basic identification card for all Ontarians. People need photo ID for a variety of things. They need it to make transactions; they need it to get on a plane; they need it for a wide variety of requirements. One shouldn't need a driver's licence at all times to provide valid identification. There are groups in this society who don't have access to the driver's licence, which is often the fundamental piece of identification that people need. The Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians has argued for a decade for this type of card. In response to a deputation made by this group, the NDP moved an amendment in committee that would ensure that a physical feature was inserted on the card to assist the visually impaired in easily locating their photo ID. This is the only amendment to have passed—and that's an issue I'll talk about further on in this speech. Regardless of that, we see this modification of the card as an advance for visually impaired Canadians.

We also put forward an amendment in committee to have the basic photo card implemented by the spring of 2009, which is significantly more rapid than the government's announced 2010 start date. Groups have been waiting at least a decade for the basic photo card, and the province, frankly, should be moving quickly to imple-

ment it so that people have access to that identification. Dr. Andrew Clement, a professor at U of T's faculty of information, said, "Rather than having to wait until 2010, its implementation should be accelerated." Unfortunately, this amendment was rejected by the government majority on the committee.

The government chose to lump the creation of the basic photo card with the creation of two new identifications: the enhanced photo card and the enhanced driver's licence. The purpose of these cards is to provide Ontarians with an alternative to a passport for land travel to the United States. They'll combine identifications with citizen information. These two cards will have embedded within them technology called radio frequency identification technology, or RFID, that will allow the wireless transmission of information up to 10 metres away. This will allow US border agents to view citizenship information far more quickly.

Now, although at first glance that might sound good to some people, this bill, Bill 85, fails the information privacy test. The legislation provides the minister with unprecedented flexibility to share personal information with other organizations, regardless of whether they need it. It doesn't provide for adequate protection against identity theft, particularly the possibility that private information is captured from the wireless transmission function of radio frequency identification technology. According to the RCMP, identity theft is a growing problem that cost everyday Ontarians almost \$10 million in 2006.

Now, I have to say first off that there seems to be this very unthought-through, uncritical sense that governments will actively and capably defend privacy over the long term, and I think the simple reality is that governments in western democracies have had significant failures with breaches of security, breaches of privacy. Britain has been the site of many scandals over the large-scale loss of personal identification information, and we should not think that we here in Ontario would be exempt. We should not think that we here in Ontario would not be in a position where hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people had very detailed identification information leaked, stolen or lost, and thus no longer secure. If we don't recognize that the potential is there for very large-scale information loss or revelation, we're completely wrong, because it happens. If in fact this goes ahead, we will be putting thousands, hundreds of thousands, likely millions, of people at risk of identity theft and revelation of personal details that I'm sure most people would not like to have in the hands of those who aren't authorized to have it.

The bill overrides privacy protection clauses in the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, and the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

Finally, the bill gives the minister significant regulation-making authority for which he or she will not be required to hold public consultations. You have to ask: When you're talking about the privacy of millions, when you're talking about regulations that can set up a situation where identity theft is made easier, should there not be consultations?

The protection of personal information is one of the most important responsibilities of government, particularly during a time of rapid advances in information technology and heightened surveillance stemming from the so-called war on terror. The Information and Privacy Commissioner laid out 20 recommendations to address these responsibilities in an exhaustive submission to the committee reviewing the legislation.

The McGuinty Liberals are pushing Bill 85 through. They've ignored most of the privacy commissioner's recommendations. The government is effectively abdicating its responsibility to citizens to provide adequate privacy protection. For this reason, the New Democratic caucus will be voting against Bill 85. I want to spend some time reviewing the major shortcomings of the bill.

Bill 85 gives broad information-sharing powers to the minister. Paragraph 11(4)7 allows the minister to share information with any public body or related government if the minister believes it necessary to meet a laundry list of purposes set out in this section. The use of the terms "public body" and "related government" would include provincial, territorial and federal departmental agency in Canada. In other words, the minister has the discretion to share personal and private information without restrictions.

Here's what the Information and Privacy Commissioner had to say about this section: "Bill 85 allows for the possibility that all personal information, including an individual's biometric, driving history, citizenship data, etc., could be shared without restriction in these instances. Individuals do not reasonably expect that when applying for a library card, the provincial government will not disclose their biometric, citizenship information, or other information to the library." That's the privacy commissioner commenting on this bill, commenting on the weaknesses in this bill.

0910

This is a problem replicated in other sections of the bill. For example, another paragraph in section 11 takes no steps to limit the information provided to the Canada Border Services Agency or the federal Department of Citizenship and Immigration. Nor does it make any distinction of the different roles they play and the different types of information they require to do their jobs. And again, I quote the Information and Privacy Commissioner: "Clearly, the purposes for collecting and disclosing information for this program are different for these two federal government entities, and Bill 85 does not reflect

these differences or appropriately limit the information flow."

Legislation should set out what type of information the minister can share, and with whom the minister can share different types of information. It should require the ministry to enter into contracts with the organizations that are sharing information so that this process is transparent and accountable. This is a fundamental weakness in the bill.

The government is taking a "trust us" attitude on information privacy. "Trust the minister," the government is saying, "to limit the information shared with other organizations." But ministers and governments come and go, and legislation remains. So whether or not we trust the current minister, how can Ontarians be asked to trust a future minister, a minister unknown, a government unknown? This is about ensuring our laws that protect privacy, not about attributes of individual ministers. This legislation has to be written so that people are protected whether the government they have is one with integrity, or one without. People have to have protection, and they have to have protection that will be sustained and strong over decades, not written for one term of government, not written for one particular minister, but written with the idea that from time to time governments will be in power that will not see protection of privacy or personal information as a priority and may in fact have ministers who would be in a position or disposition to abuse the power that's in their hands. That's why legislation is written: to set in place a framework so that governments act in a way that is not unbridled, that is responsive to the people and that is accountable.

The Information and Privacy Commissioner recommended drastic changes to subsection 11(4). We proposed those amendments in committee, including the requirement that the ministries enter into contracts with the organizations they share information with, outlining the types of information that will be shared. The government members voted against them.

Moving on with concerns about Bill 85, we take serious issue with the way the McGuinty government is ignoring privacy concerns related to radio frequency identification technology itself. This technology is relatively new and powerful and requires careful oversight. The technology will be embedded in the enhanced driver's licences and enhanced photo cards.

Here's what Graeme Norton of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association had to say about the lack of legislative safeguards on radio frequency identification technology: "Border officials may not be the only people capable of accessing the information contained on the EDL's RFID chips. Rather, anyone possessing a relatively cheap and easily obtainable RFID reader may be able to access the number contained on the enhanced driver's licences from as far away as 10 metres."

So the question you have to ask is, if people with a device they can purchase can read your detailed personal information on the card, how secure is that? The answer is it's not secure. You are opening a can of worms. You

are opening up people's detailed private information to casual surveillance by anyone who has an interest, either for commercial gains through identity theft, or for some other purpose that for the moment I can't name, and frankly, the government can't name. People will find all kinds of uses for detailed personal information.

The government has argued that because the information that would be stolen does not include personally identifiable information—it contains a unique number rather than a name—it's safe. But countless stakeholder groups here and in jurisdictions that already have enhanced driver's licences have dismissed that argument completely. This unique number is not meaningless, just like our social insurance numbers are not meaningless. Through the use of an unauthorized reader, an identity thief could determine a cardholder's identity and track the cardholder without their knowledge.

The simple reality is that in this society, heavily wired, a society in which identity theft is a common and growing problem—one that credit card companies and others are constantly working to guard against—one cannot rule out the potential for large-scale identity theft and utilization of information for theft, for fraud and for impersonation.

Here's what the Canadian Civil Liberties Association says: "If, for example, an RFID reader was set up at a specific location, such as a place of work or worship, it could be used to determine when a particular individual comes and goes based on the individual identifier contained on the EDL."

I can't say it any better than Ontario's Information and Privacy Commissioner: "Even if the data on the card cannot be associated with existing personal information about the cardholder, it may be used to collect personally identifiable information over time."

One way to reduce identity theft from the unauthorized use of the cards is to limit their transmission functions. The province's solution to this problem is a plastic sleeve that the card can be placed in to prevent unauthorized transmission. That puts a disproportionate burden for privacy protection on the individual card holder.

The privacy commissioner recommends that all cards have an on-off switch. It would be the most effective method of preventing identity theft. Several companies have already developed this technology, so it isn't a theoretical option. We moved several amendments on the use of radio frequency information technology to limit the possibility of identity theft, in line with the commissioner's recommendations. It seems reasonable to us that a commissioner who has the jurisdiction of and responsibility for privacy makes recommendations. One would see them as authorities, people whose words should be taken.

One of our amendments would have required the government to have an independent third party undertake a privacy audit of the technology. We wanted this privacy audit to be tabled in the Legislature. This is the transparent and accountable solution. The government members voted against this amendment.

We also proposed an amendment to force the government to follow the radio frequency identification guidelines established by the Information and Privacy Commissioner. The government voted against this amendment.

Finally, we proposed an amendment to require any use of radio frequency technology to have an on-off switch. Showing further disregard for advice of stakeholders and the privacy commissioner, the government voted against this amendment too.

The last area I want to draw this House's attention to is about public consultations. Bill 85 leaves a lot to regulation; not surprising, given the government's cavalier "trust us" attitude. The privacy commissioner and virtually every concerned stakeholder called for the government to require public consultations on the regulations before they're enacted. The privacy commissioner points out that this was done when previous governments brought in FIPPA, PFIPPA, the Environmental Bill of Rights and the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

If the government is going to leave key decisions to regulations, there should be direct public engagement. For example, subsection 11(7) of the bill allows the government to define, through regulation, the term "public body," in reference to organizations that the minister can share the information with. This decision shouldn't be left to regulation in the first place. At the very least, if the minister wants to have regulation-making authority over this definition and other matters, there should be broad public consultation to determine the impacts of enacting these regulations.

The privacy commissioner thought a public consultation on regulations was so important that she provided in her submission a two-page amendment. The NDP and the official opposition introduced it. It was rejected by the government majority—no surprise.

After the commissioner's detailed remarks outlining her concerns with Bill 85, the member from Timmins—James Bay moved a resolution to have the commissioner return to go over the amendments with the committee members and offer an opinion as to whether they meet her recommendations. There was a blatant display of partisanship over policy, and the government members voted against the resolution. By voting against this initiative and 50 or so amendments put forward by the opposition, the Liberals have shown a complete disregard for the Information and Privacy Commissioner, an independent officer of the Legislature, and her staff's expertise. I hope the commissioner will speak out about this behaviour over the coming weeks and in her annual report.

The Consumers Council of Canada says the following: "The government's proposed enhanced driver's licence under the Photo Card Act, 2008, needs to be seriously reconsidered." We urge the government to stop this bill from proceeding, to rework the legislation to ensure the privacy concerns are dealt with, and then bring it back to this House. We urge the government to accept the privacy commissioner's criticisms and work with her

office to develop better legislation. I hope that's not wishful thinking.

I find it extraordinary that this government would proceed with a bill so fundamentally flawed. I find it extraordinary that they would ignore the advice of an officer of the Legislature, the privacy commissioner, and proceed with this legislation. At some point, something will go wrong with this legislation and people will ask, "How on earth did this get through? How is it that we have this system here in Ontario?" All we'll be able to say is that a majority Liberal government ignored the sound warnings that were given to them about the pitfalls of this bill, did not act properly and did not act responsibly.

0920

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. John O'Toole: I always like to listen to the debate on this Bill 85. In fact, it looks like the bill will likely pass—and I spoke on it before. I would draw to the members' attention an article in the Toronto Star from yesterday. It is entitled, "Province's 'Enhanced' Driver's Licence Could Increase Privacy, Security Risks." I think it's an extremely important article; it's very insightful. My point would be that the collection of the data and this RFID signal on these cards and the security issue—I think we should slow down a bit and get it right. Because personal security and personal information stuff should not be as casually available—not just to the government; it's not the Big Brother issue here. The issue here is getting the legislation right. I think it isn't being drafted properly and they're working too hastily on this bill.

I don't think it's going to solve the problem. I think photo ID for persons who don't have a licence is a good option, but we can get a passport. Do you understand? But this does nothing to resolve the tourism issue for Americans coming into Canada. They're not going to be using our card. So the photo ID intent is to deal with the 9/11 issue at the borders. I don't think it's going to solve the issue; it's going to create further issues. This isn't me speaking; this is Ann Cavoukian. It's saying here, "The third issue is by far the most important—the privacy implications associated with the use of biometric screening and embedding RFID tags in the licences."

That's the problem. It's a technical issue I'm bringing up. I'm cautioning the ministry as well as the government to go easy on this thing. You're going to win the bill and we're going to support it, but the problem is the security issue. Slow it down. Get it right. Otherwise, we're going to have an additional problem.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? I'll return to the member for Toronto—Danforth, who has two minutes to reply if he chooses to do so.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's interesting to me that the government has no commentary on this. They are pushing through a bill that opens a huge field of risk for the citizens of this province. I was talking to my son last night about this. He hadn't heard about this legislation.

He, in fact, then went and looked at the paper, and as the member from the opposition party said, there was an article in the Star, in the business pages, I think page 3. Very few people are aware that we are embarked on a project and a process that can put the privacy and personal information of large numbers of citizens at risk. They are unaware that we are in a situation where they will be carrying an identity card that can be read remotely at a range of—what?—10 metres, where their information can be picked up and utilized by people who would use it for commercial purposes. If there's anyone in this Legislature who has had the experience of their credit card or their ATM card being pirated, they'll know that we already have a problem with PIN numbers and cards, with people taking advantage of breaks into their security systems to get money out of their accounts.

What we have now is a system that will make it far easier for someone to impersonate a person electronically, something that will allow those who have malevolent intent to dig in to our personal information, utilize it against us, use it for ill-gotten gain. This is a government that is not just simply sleepwalking towards this goal; it's running towards this goal. This is irresponsible on your part. It doesn't show the integrity and the responsibility that a government should be showing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos: I suspect I may well be the last participant in this debate this morning. I suspect this bill is going to go to a vote today. I suspect as well that the bill is going to pass, notwithstanding that the New Democrats have opposed it throughout the course of its process through committee and now into third reading.

One question is, first of all, what's the hurry? Number two, the question is how does this type of policy development occur?

I will suggest—thank you kindly. I will suggest that—the note's for you, Mr. Tabuns.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'll take the note, thanks.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I think it's a membership application.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Then give me more. Don't hold back.

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Kormos: The public might be interested in how these sorts of policy developments occur.

Mr. Mike Colle: That was a privacy violation.

Mr. Peter Kormos: It's not a—wait a minute. I'll read it to you if you want me to. It says, "Peter Tabuns, please provide Hansard with the notes and quotes that you made during the course of your comments." I'll take care of that for Mr. Tabuns, certainly.

Look, the question that's probably asked by many members of the public is, "How does this sort of policy development take place?" I have the greatest regard for the Minister of Transportation, but I can tell you this wasn't a matter of Jim Bradley sitting down with a couple of senior policy advisers, scratching their heads and saying, "What can we do? What can we come up

with to make life easier for Ontarians? What can we come up with to facilitate passage across the border? What can we come up with to assist seniors who want to have proof of age, for instance, when they're seeking discounts at Sears or the Bay on seniors' day? What can we come up with to assist young people who want proof of age so that they can do the things that require them to be of the age of majority?"

This reminds me very much of photo radar, and I'll tell you why. Just like photo radar wasn't a matter of Gilles Poulriot sitting down, scratching his head and saying, "I've got an idea. We'll go shopping around for somebody who manufactures cameras that work on highways," what happens is, the people who develop this technology market it to governments. They wine and dine deputy ministers. They wine and dine ministers. They ignore backbenchers because they realize that backbenchers have no influence, no impact and no role to play whatsoever in policy development. But the manufacturers of this kind of technology sell their product, and they sell it to governments. They not only sell it to governments with wining and dining and all sorts of accommodation, but they actually provide the government with the spin lines. They provide the government with the angles. They provide the government with the style to be utilized.

It happened with casino gaming. There wasn't a brain trust sitting in the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations, saying, "We need casinos in Ontario." It was the manufacturers of casino equipment, the people who run casinos—many of them with historic mob connections—who came to government and said, "We've got a solution to your fiscal woes, and we'll help you market it." The casino slot machine manufacturers go to governments and say, "Not only will we help you generate new revenues, pick the pockets of your residents and visitors, we'll give you the marketing angles; we'll help you convince your community that casino gaming is entertainment, that it's fun for the whole family."

Well, clearly, in this instance, the private interests that stand to make a great deal of money from the marketing of this type of technology, came to government and said, "We've got a deal for you." They not only convinced the government that this was a good deal for them, they convinced the government that the private sector had to play an integral role in it, notwithstanding all the risks that that entails, but they've also given the government the spin lines.

0930

I suppose the bill would be inoffensive if it weren't for, effectively, sections 3 and 4, because the one observation is that acquiring one of these cards is purely voluntary, just as acquiring a credit card is voluntary. I agree with Mr. Tabuns. I don't know how people can dispute what Mr. Tabuns says about the risks in the sort of technology that is contained in credit cards and bank access cards. The identity theft that occurs through the use of that technology is rampant and, indeed, probably far greater than the general public is advised of.

All of us in our constituency offices alone hear horror story after horror story from constituents who have had

their bank account emptied, who have had charges racked up on their credit card everywhere from Nigeria to Tasmania. I had one constituent who came in and her credit card had been used to buy 400 Skil saws at a Home Depot down in Oklahoma, and it was only at that event that the credit card company called her and said, "This is a mighty peculiar purchase for a person with your buying patterns."

So I don't think people should treat lightly the concerns about the risks of the invasion of privacy and the risks of identity theft that are inherent in this technology.

As I say, it's voluntary. And a wise consumer would say to this government, "We don't want your high-tech ID card, especially your enhanced one." The problem is, it isn't entirely voluntary, because a person who wants the basic ID card that may not entail all of the risks of the high-tech, enhanced ID card can acquire one only if she or he does not hold a valid driver's licence. A person can acquire an enhanced card only if she or he doesn't hold a valid driver's licence, but if a person holds a valid driver's licence, then they are obliged to get the enhanced card should they wish an identity card.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: No, they're not.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Read the legislation. The member for Algoma-Manitoulin hasn't read the bill, once again. For Pete's sake, how long has he been here? And he's still not reading legislation? One of the problems I've learned around here is that people vote on stuff—they're whipped—without ever having read the legislation, never mind the policy implications.

For the life of me, I can't understand why the member for Algoma-Manitoulin would insist that that's not the case. Read section 4, and it says very plainly and clearly there that if you hold a driver's licence and you want an identity card, you have to get an enhanced driver's licence card—end of story. You can't get the unenhanced identity card, the one that may well entail less risk.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Do you understand what I'm saying, Speaker? We've got nattering here. You know, there was a time when I sent over colouring books and crayons to people like the member from Algoma-Manitoulin and let his constituents know that he was assigned to the task of trying to stay inside the lines. And that he wasn't to eat the crayons.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: You see, the problem, Mr. Watson, is that you're heckling me. You're supposed to be making me look stupid rather than yourself. So I find it very strange that the Liberal—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would just ask the member for Welland to address the Speaker, because when you turn to the gallery, I can't hear you. So I would just ask you to address me so that I can hear what you're saying.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I appreciate the presence of the folks in the gallery, and I'm pleased that the—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): You're turning away from me right now, member for Welland, and I can't hear what you're saying.

Mr. Peter Kormos: The morning's activities, among them—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Your microphone should be off. Now your microphone is on. Would the member take his seat for a moment please? Would the member please take his seat for just one second? Thank you very much.

I would just say to the member for Welland, I can't hear you when you're turning to speak to the gallery. I'd ask you to address your comments to the Chair.

I return to the member for Welland.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I confess I was speaking to the people in the visitors' gallery, just like I'm talking to folks at home, and I do it through you. I speak in the third person because, you see, addressing the Speaker doesn't mean that you have to look at the Speaker. It means that you address the Speaker. Sir, I appreciate your guidance and I appreciate your assistance and your counsel.

I appreciate that people in this province are concerned about this government's abdication of its role as a safeguard, as being responsible to safeguard what has become incredibly high-risk information. That's the sort of information that's going to be encoded in these enhanced identity cards. We're talking about the ability now to use your little four-number PIN to access your bank account or to use it to access your credit card and rack up incredible charges, to use it to access your identity and put you at great risk. This government just went through an exercise of having to address the issue of identity theft and the loss of homes, the loss of hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of property: people's own personal homes, their residences. Now they proceed in such a foolhardy, high-risk way. I don't think that's responsible behaviour, do you, Speaker? I don't think it's responsible at all, especially when there's no urgency, when I haven't heard a single constituent come to my office and say, "We want some sort of post-Orwellian high-tech identity card." I tell you, this is well beyond 1984—well, well beyond 1984.

We've got a privacy commissioner who admonished this government around its carelessness when it came to the adoption act and whose position was upheld by the courts. Once again, we have the same privacy commissioner who admonishes this government and tells it to be very, very cautious about proceeding with this legislation when the technology to provide real safeguards simply doesn't exist. This could be a huge amount of money made in the provision of this card by the private sector, by the corporate sponsors of this sort of exercise, and also putting people at risk because that corporate sector, that private sector—these are the same people who sell your names to mailing lists, for instance, or sell your e-mail address, increasingly, to marketers who create profiles of a community that can pinpoint and understand the behaviour and habits and purchasing habits of any given individual. Understand that in the casinos, when they invite you to acquire a casino card because you earn points every time you play the slots, it's not about attracting customers or keeping them or giving them points and

awards. It's about collecting information. That casino knows exactly who you are, how much you're going to spend; to wit, how much you're going to lose. It knows whether you want olives or lemon twists in your martini. It knows how long you're inclined to stay at that casino and it knows who the biggest losers are so it can then offer them free rooms, free meals or free show packages and increasingly victimize people—when we have government like this, a province like this where the real addition to gambling and gambling proceeds is that of the government, more so than of individuals whose lives are destroyed by casino gaming.

0940

The Canadian Civil Liberties Association has expressed concern about this legislation and the recklessness of this government in proceeding with such haste. I am going to make reference, very specifically, to the concerns expressed by the privacy commissioner and the efforts by the opposition to effect amendments to this legislation that would address the concerns raised by the privacy commissioner. But this government's refusal to adopt those amendments—in fact, they voted them down and made sure they didn't become part of this legislation.

For the life of me, I think this careless exercise on the part of this government will earn condemnation across this province. I say to people that, once this bill passes, they should absolutely, 100%, reject any invitation to get this government's enhanced photo ID card. Doing so will, one, save them money because undoubtedly there are going to be huge fees earned by the government and by the private sector partners in the issuing of these cards; two, there's going to be huge interest in the information that's being acquired that is very much at risk of being marketed—where the insurance industry has access to the Ministry of Transportation records on a regular basis. You knew that, didn't you? Private records? I think not. The insurance industry—those who wish to, scan them frequently and obtain all sorts of information from them, some which is relevant to the insurance industry and its role, other information which is relevant only to enhancing profits.

New Democrats are clear that we understand the increased risk that people's privacy is placed in in this high-tech computerized era when homes are wired, when wireless is even more pervasive. Any 10-year-old kid is capable of telling this government and its—I say ironically—brain trust, that you can hack bank accounts, you can hack government records, you can hack department store records, you can hack insurance company records, you can hack health records. How many cases do we have to witness before we understand that that's commonplace? And 10-, 11-, 12-year-old kids are doing it on a regular basis, just for fun. The evidence was clear at the committee—was it 10 feet?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Ten metres.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Ten metres.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: That's a fair distance.

Mr. Peter Kormos: That's a good chunk of distance—about from me to the members' gallery up there,

where those good folks are sitting in and watching this morning's parliamentary proceedings, waiting, I hope, for question period.

That means that you could be walking down the street—and we're not talking about big satellite dishes so that they're apparent and obvious—you could be walking into your supermarket, you could be walking into your department store, you could be walking into your city hall and be, oh, so unobtrusively scanned such that every single byte of data on that enhanced card is unloaded into somebody else's file for them to use in however creative a way they wish to use it.

This silly harping about a number that applies rather than the name—people understand how frail their PIN numbers are. The number that's being applied to these so-called enhanced cards is no more effective and no less effective than a PIN.

So I look forward to the vote on this. New Democrats will stand, five of us, to ensure that there is a recorded vote so that our opposition to this can be expressed very, very clearly.

As well, we want to make it clear once again that people in this province should shun this government's effort to raid their personal information and data.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: The member always brings sound observations, I would say, to the table.

When you look at Bill 85, we know, on third reading today, it's actually going to pass. The government's here and they have people stacked up outside to carry the vote.

We would like to make one commitment here. I think the intent is sound, but, as I mentioned earlier, there are issues around the privacy side of it. I think that if we look at the idea of these photo ID cards, tied, in some cases—there are three types of cards. One is just the card for identification for, as somebody said, a senior going in to purchase something on seniors' day or something like that, who doesn't have a driver's licence, where that would be a good piece of ID.

The one that we're concerned about is the one with this radio frequency card in it, where potentially the privacy information could get into the wrong hands. That's what our concern is. As the member from Welland said, just take your time here and get it right. When you're tinkering with persons' rights of privacy, don't go too fast just to say you got it done before Christmas.

Ultimately, this is not a provincial responsibility. Inter-border issues are a federal responsibility, i.e., the passport. There should be a national card. It's not going to do any good for someone going to the United States through Quebec. This will only be an Ontario kind of card. It's not a nationally recognized card. In fact, we have no assurance that the United States will secure the card. They're going to get the information. They scan it and they've got our data. What are they going to do with the data? Are they going to link it to other profiled information?

This is too much, too fast, and in fact the government will force it through without doing the right thing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: I just wanted to put on the record that I have a constituent who has been fighting for 10 years to get a non-driver's ID. He's a senior. His name is Rubin Cipin. He lives at number 2 Neptune in my riding. He has worked along with the CNIB in Toronto to ensure that seniors who don't drive obtain a valid identification card, and that's what's in this bill. I know that sometimes we don't stand up and appreciate the work of our citizens and organizations like the CNIB, but this bill finally, after years of asking—I think this campaign has been going on certainly a decade that I've been aware of it. This card will be of great service to people who don't drive, especially to seniors who don't have easy access to a photo ID. This will give them identification that will be of most value to them. I just want to say that the people who are visually impaired and certainly those who have been involved with the CNIB think this is very important and long overdue.

In terms of this card, I wish it would be available earlier, but it's going to be done—again, we're hearing the opposition say, "Well, slow down." But it's already been, as I say, 10 years, and we are going to have to wait another year. It will be 2010 before this will be fully available to seniors. This is one achievement that is possible with this bill, having this ID that I know seniors like Rubin Cipin and all the good folks at number 2 Neptune, on Bathurst will certainly—we're going to have a party up at 2 Neptune when they get that first card.

0950

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's interesting, when you look at the purpose of this bill, in terms of what we all would agree is a need. Right? We would all agree that there is a need for some kind of identification for folks like the one described by the member from Eglinton—Lawrence, who don't drive and who have a need for a piece of identification that assists them in their travels back and forth.

But when you have a piece of legislation that the Information and Privacy Commissioner has concerns about and raises red flags about, then holy smokes, it's up to the government to stand back and say, "Maybe we need to take a second look."

What did our critic do? Gilles Bisson asked the committee to do that very thing, to have the Information and Privacy Commissioner come back to the committee level and discuss the concerns that were put on the table in regard to Bill 85. Did the government open the door and invite the privacy commissioner to come back to the table and have that broader discussion? No.

It seems to me that when you are talking about people's private information, the very least you can do is get the insights, the knowledge and the skill of the Information and Privacy Commissioner to enlighten your debate and enlighten your decision-making process.

There's nothing scary or fearful about that. In fact, I think it would be the obligation of a government to heed the advice of these very people we put in place to protect the interests of the public, to protect the interests of the senior, like the one described by the previous member.

I think it's challenging, at the least, to know that our government here in Ontario is not concerned with the comments of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, the Council of Canadians, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association and on and on. A number of stakeholders have come to the table with serious concerns about the privacy of the information being put on this card, and it's a concern that New Democrats share.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question or comment. Seeing none, I will turn to the member for Welland, who has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I wish the Liberal backbenchers would simply pay more attention and realize what their government is doing to Ontarians, and come clean with the people they're speaking to.

For Pete's sake, if you want to give a senior an ID card, then authorize the Ministry of Transportation offices to take his or her photo, put it on a card and charge them 10 bucks for it. That's all that's needed; you didn't have to wait 10 years.

This proposal is being marketed by the manufacturers of the technology, who stand to make huge profit and who are using Ontarians as guinea pigs, quite frankly. Ontarians are paying for it, and they'll pay twice and thrice, because it puts them at incredible high risk of having their identity stolen.

Mr. Mike Colle: Give seniors a break.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Give seniors a break? You give them a break, because you know, right now, that seniors are amongst the most targeted community for identity theft, credit card fraud and robbing their accounts. And you're doing nothing. I say to Mr. McGuinty and his Liberal clan that they're exposing seniors to more risk than ever with their enhanced identity card.

If you want identity cards, authorize the MTO to take a photo, put it on a card and call it an identity card. You don't need this legislation, and you know it.

The people who create this technology, the people who have an interest in stealing and collecting this information, are the ones who want it. You're at their beck and call. This is a despicable abdication by this government of its regard and respect for its citizens and the privacy of its citizens. You're exposing Ontarians to more risk, in terms of identity theft and fraud, than they've ever been exposed to before. You're exposing them to predators who will prey on them, especially seniors, because they're the people who are targeted by the scam artists who will prey on seniors with the information that can be so readily stolen from these identity cards. If only you people would come clean.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? Are there any members who wish to participate in this debate?

Mr. Bradley has moved third reading of Bill 85. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

I've been advised that this vote will take place at the time of deferred votes today, after question period.

Third reading vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Orders of the day.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: There's no further business for this morning.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): This House is in recess until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 0955 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'd like to welcome the mother of page Samantha Meeks, Barbara Jessop, and grandmother Marg Jessop and grandfather Merv Jessop. They'll be sitting in the public gallery.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It's my pleasure to introduce the best perogy makers in Ontario, Peter and Helen Danchuk from Dufferin-Caledon, who also happen to be here for their granddaughter, page Sarah.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's a great pleasure for me to introduce members from the Police Association of Ontario from my area, Sarnia-Lambton and Chatham: Marc Toutant, Peter Baker, Julie Peters, Patricia Stone and Jodi Foster.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: It's my pleasure to introduce Larry Molyneaux, the new president of the Police Association of Ontario; Ron Middel, the new chief administrative officer of the PAO; and welcome all the police officers who are here today lobbying for better policing in Ontario.

Mr. Bill Mauro: I'd like to introduce, representing Thunder Bay and the Thunder Bay Police Association, part of the Police Association of Ontario, Greg Stephenson.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of the member from Brampton West and page Sarah Danchuk—many of these individuals have been introduced but we want to make sure they're all here: Nick Danchuk, her father, who will be sitting in the public gallery; her grandfather Eric McCabe, her grandmother Helen Danchuk, and her grandfather Peter Danchuk. We welcome all of those individuals today.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd beg the indulgence of the House in allowing the pages to be introduced. Pages, please take your positions.

I'd like to ask all members to join me in welcoming this group of Legislative pages serving in the first session of the 39th Parliament:

Zac Baum, Beaches–East York; Samiha Chowdhury, Scarborough Centre; Sarah Danchuk, Brampton West; Courtney Dodds, Ajax–Pickering; Sahara Douglas, Mississauga South; Jason Fernandes, Mississauga–Streetsville; Jacqueline Gilchrist, Dufferin–Caledon; Bradyn Litster, Hamilton Centre; Sara Maltese, Eglinton–Lawrence; Tess McGurn, Barrie; Samantha Meeks, London–Fanshawe; Swapnil Patki, Windsor West; Rohan Pavone, Pickering–Scarborough East; Amanda Persaud-Thomas, Oak Ridges–Markham; Sarah Ratzlaff, Toronto–Danforth; Ieta Shams, York Centre; Kush Thaker, Markham–Unionville; Luis Vera, Timiskaming–Cochrane; Jenna Waters, Wellington–Halton Hills; Brittny Whitaker, Niagara Falls.

Welcome to all of our pages.

Applause.

ORAL QUESTIONS

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Premier. Premier, I took a quick read this morning of yesterday's Hansard and the questions from both opposition parties related to the economy, primarily the auto sector. Questions were directed to you, questions that in my view didn't receive any meaningful answers. This is a critically important issue in relation to the future of this province, so I'm going to try again.

Can you advise the House of what you see, specifically, Ontario can do to support the 400,000 jobs and the families and communities that depend on those jobs in the auto sector?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm very pleased to return to this subject matter. It's very important to many Ontarians and, indeed, to the national economy. I would ask my colleague opposite to recognize that we actually have yet to receive a special request from the auto execs. I had a chance to meet with them, together with Minister Bryant, the other day. They did not put a specific request on the table. I have had an opportunity to speak with the Prime Minister about this issue. I know that Minister Clement and Minister Bryant will be travelling to Washington to see what we can gather there by way of next steps that will be taken by either the Bush administration in its final phase or those changes that might be anticipated under an Obama administration. But we will continue to work as closely as we can with the federal government and with the auto sector to make sure that at the end we are there with the appropriate support, providing the appropriate protection to taxpayers.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I guess, reading comments from the minister related to his view of the world in terms of the need for Ontario to move ahead and not wait for the United States and the federal government to make a decision in respect to support—clearly, the minister who is representing you on this file has some clear

ideas with respect to how to address the concerns, specifically with the Big Three automakers. I would ask you again, given the public stance that your minister has taken, can you be specific with respect to what he's talking about, what he's thinking about? Clearly, he's discussed that with you in your office.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I've had many conversations with the minister on this, but one thing that I think we all have to keep in mind here is that if it was just a matter of Ontario, for example, competing with the state of Michigan, that would be one thing. But as it stands now, in terms of the support that's about to be offered to the US auto sector, we are up against the US Treasury. Ontario is right now up against the United States of America with all its economic might. So at the end of the day, it's going to be absolutely essential to find common ground here together with the federal government.

When it comes to the issues of liquidity, the challenges being faced by the auto sector to get credit to maintain their ongoing operations, that's something where the federal government is going to have to play the key role. So we can't land on a specific at this point in time without involving the feds.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Well, it is interesting to hear that there have been no specific proposals, and I guess that is because of the situation in the United States. We all know that the US is facing a recession and significant job losses, something like 8% unemployment being projected. President-elect Obama has more than a vested interest in keeping the US auto industry alive and viable, and we also suspect that this new administration in the United States is going to have a much more protectionist tilt than has been the case in the past. Clearly, this is an additional complication in terms of the approach your government and the federal government will have to take to Washington. Can you elaborate on how you're going to approach that specific issue, in terms of dealing with a much more protectionist administration in Washington?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: This is an important issue raised by my colleague and that's something we're going to have to keep a very close eye on. I think ideally we would like to find some way to come close to mirroring the support that will be provided by the US for their auto sector so that we don't lose any ground here. But this is a matter that is in a continuous state of flux. I think the single most important thing that we can do is make sure we're keeping the lines open between ourselves and the federal government and the auto sector here. As well, I'll be meeting with the head of the Canadian Auto Workers to get their take on this. We're trying to stay in touch as well with some of the communities that are affected by this industry. I think the most important thing we can do is keep the lines of communication open.

1040

FUNDRAISING

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is to the Premier. It was clear yesterday, when I raised the issue of the Liberal

Party fundraiser that was to be held tonight, that that was perhaps the first time you had heard that your Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities was having a fundraiser along with the Minister of Labour at a union-owned, government-funded skills training centre. Could that have anything to do with the fact that this fundraiser appears to have been postponed for a week and its location has been moved to the Ontario Liberal Party's headquarters?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm just waiting for what I'm sure is going to be a very important note, Speaker. I understand that my friend is correct. The fundraiser has been moved elsewhere.

Interjections.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Who says you can't be effective in opposition?

Anyway, I can report that the fundraiser has been moved.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Premier, to be kind, the fact speaks volumes about your lack of leadership and knowledge of what your ministers are up to. This last-minute change, hours after yesterday's question, is an admission, as you have said today, on your part that your training minister and the Minister of Labour, who's a guest speaker at the fundraiser, exhibited poor judgment in the choice of venues.

Premier, as a result of this display of appalling poor judgment, have you sent a directive out to your cabinet, prohibiting them from holding fundraisers at places that receive government funding from their respective ministries?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, I'm going to refer this to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. John Milloy: It's too bad that the member opposite didn't invest a little bit more in terms of research. He could have gone over and asked his friend Mr. Hudak, the Chair of the estimates committee, about the schedule for estimates. I received a letter several weeks ago from Mr. Hudak asking me to appear in front of estimates on Tuesday, November 18, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. As a result of that, I could no longer attend the fundraiser. The fundraiser is not taking place and was rescheduled for a later time and place.

As to the insinuation that the honourable member wants to make that there was a problem with the funding that was given to him, once again, I say he should stand up in this House and make an accusation, go outside and make an accusation, or hold his tongue.

The simple fact of the matter is, yes, they received money through the STIP program. The STIP program was put in place by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and the authority for that was delegated to the deputy minister. It was a clear—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: That's a laughable answer. Since I first asked this question on October 30, I've been stating these facts inside this House—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just ask everyone—we have lots of guests here today, including lots of grade 5 students, and I'm sure these grade 5 students understand what it's like to be respectful in a classroom. I would just ask that we offer that within this chamber.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I hate being interrupted because I have to get my blood pressure to a certain level to be effective. Anyway, Minister, your judgment has been appalling. Premier, you should have known.

When I first asked this question on October 30, you took it as a joke. Your cabinet ministers—many of them laughed. They laughed again yesterday. This isn't a laughing matter. This is an appalling lack of judgment and a complete conflict of interest. I ask the Premier again, what are you going to do to make sure this doesn't happen again?

Hon. John Milloy: As I said, the event in question was postponed or cancelled several weeks ago and it is taking place in a few weeks. Because of scheduling, it's at a different venue.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I ask him to stand up and say what's wrong with the fact that the Ontario Sheet Metal Workers received money to purchase equipment and installation associated with sheet metal worker training, including a plasma cutter, manual lifts, elevator platforms and a fume extractor. They received money for their Toronto facility for equipment related to training for gasfitters and sheet metal mechanics, including high-efficiency heating systems and water heaters.

The simple fact of the matter is, I'm very proud of the fact that we work with our training partners in order to deliver training to apprentices. The system to award those grants is done at arm's length from the minister—it has been delegated to the deputy minister—and it is a fair and transparent process. If he has allegations otherwise, then I invite him to stand up and share—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Premier. Mr. Premier, here is the state of the Ontario economy in year six of the McGuinty economic management: We have an auto industry, responsible for one in six jobs in southern Ontario, which is engaged in a day-to-day fight for survival; we have a forest industry, the backbone of the northern Ontario economy, where 9,000 direct and another 40,000 indirect jobs have been lost.

When will this Premier admit that after more than five years in office, his economic plan has failed and that, quite frankly, the five-point plan that he keeps talking about has not been able to deal with the tidal wave of job losses that continues to hit Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think that Ontarians, notwithstanding the assertions made by my colleague, understand that there is more at play in Ontario than just the impact of our economic policies. There are national policies that have some influence in our province, and

there are some very important global economic circumstances which are at play here as well.

But I can tell you, the most thoughtful people on this matter tell us that it's really important for us to continue to make the kinds of investments we've made in the skills and education of our people, in our infrastructure, in promoting innovation, in reducing our business taxes and in continuing to go ahead with partnerships with businesses. That's the foundation on which we've built our economic house in the province of Ontario, and we'll keep strengthening that as we move forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Michael Prue: The Premier continues to point to factors beyond his control, but the point is that there are many tools in the provincial economic tool box that the McGuinty government simply has refused to use to date. For example, just last night on TVO's *The Agenda*, Jamie Lim, president of the Ontario Forest Industries Association, said that the battered forestry products industry desperately needs an industrial hydro rate. We have, on this side of the House, been talking about that for years.

Why is this Premier continuing to refuse to implement an industrial hydro rate to save jobs in northern Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We have been working with the forestry sector—I think we have some \$1 billion that we've made available for supports—and we've moved ahead on a number of fronts where we're had the support of the individual referenced by my colleague.

But there's nothing that's really easy. He's suggesting that if we somehow reduce hydro rates for industry, somehow there's not going to be an impact on the remaining ratepayers. Those are individual homeowners and the like.

We are going to continue to work with the forestry sector. We'll continue to work, through the Minister of Energy, on doing everything that we can to maintain responsible hydro rates. But I think it's not entirely responsible to say that the quick fix is to be found simply in reducing hydro rates for one particular sector.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Michael Prue: I think that a real forward-looking strategy would also look at the quality of jobs that are being created. More than one million Ontarians work at jobs paying \$10 an hour or less. There is simply no way that a family can survive on less than \$10 an hour. A new report out today makes this perfectly clear. This Premier can immediately put money into the pockets of those who will spend it by simply using one of the most important tools in the government's economic tool box: the minimum wage.

Will this Premier act immediately to raise the minimum wage to \$10.25 an hour, or are one million people going to have to wait another two years to earn a decent wage so that they can contribute to this economy?

1050

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It really comes down to a sense of balance. My friend has an interesting proposal—

we've heard it many times before—but he's suggesting that we discount entirely the consequences of moving to that kind of a minimum wage on the business community. Businesses are having a hard time today in Ontario, and I think the last thing we want to do is impose some new costs on them. What we are doing is moving ahead with responsible levels of increase in the minimum wage. We've done that some five times now. We will continue to move ahead with increases in the minimum wage in the future, but we'll always do it in a responsible way, always trying to strike the balance between fairness for workers and fairness for those who are making the investments and creating jobs for our workers.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Mr. Michael Prue: Again, back to the Premier: One of the great failures of this government is its failure to develop an effective Buy Ontario strategy. When the government had a chance to require 50% of domestic content for transportation, it chose 25%. When it had a chance to implement a credible Buy Ontario policy for energy, which would have created thousands of new jobs by creating our very own wind turbine industry, it failed to approve projects such as the 150-turbine proposal by Trillium Power Wind Corp. When will this Premier finally quit tilting at windmills and seize the opportunity to create jobs?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. George Smitherman: On the matter of energy creating jobs, I had the extraordinary pleasure, as the Premier has had in the last few weeks, of attending at the opening of significant new wind farms, part of the evolution of green energy, which is helping to fuel the green economy in the province of Ontario.

But on the matter at hand with respect to domestic content—the member has mentioned both energy and transportation infrastructure projects—I think it has been clear over the course of the last few weeks in this House that we are working to adopt policies which can enhance even further the amount of domestic content in the matter of purchasing methods.

Mr. Michael Prue: The minister has admitted that much more can be done, but the fact is that other provinces, and I cite Quebec, had the foresight to kick-start their own wind manufacturing industry. Hydro-Québec plans to spend \$5.5 billion on 2,004 megawatts of wind power, with most of the equipment to be manufactured in that province. In Quebec, 60% of the total expenditure for each wind farm must be incurred in that province, creating thousands of green jobs. At a time of massive job loss in Ontario, Ontario should be a world leader; instead, we are a world laggard. We're not even on the map.

My question back to the minister: How does the minister explain the failure of this government to actually go in this direction?

Hon. George Smitherman: The honourable member, in an effort to make his point, exaggerates to the point of

defying credibility. To refer to the province of Ontario as a laggard in the evolution of green energy is to seriously state on that member's behalf that he doesn't get it and he hasn't sought to research the matter at hand.

In the case of Quebec, indeed there are lessons to be applied from that very jurisdiction, and we're looking very much at the manner in which they have worked. As the Premier had a chance to say yesterday, the very steel for the wind turbines that the member speaks about came from Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. This is an example of the opportunities in the evolving green economy and related to green energy to make important contributions to our economic circumstances. We've done that in a variety of ways already. There is area for improvement, and the honourable member should stay tuned for actions in this very regard.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Michael Prue: I have been awaiting actions for a long time. I'd like to return to the proposal by Trillium Power Wind Corp. Multibrid, a German-based turbine manufacturer, is working with Trillium, a local renewable energy developer, to build a massive wind farm in Lake Ontario. This project alone would likely require an investment of more than \$1 billion and would consist of 150 turbines.

Trillium, which sees its Lake Ontario project as the beginning of a new industrial strategy for the province and a creator of high-value, green-collar jobs, desperately wants to purchase its turbines from a manufacturer like Multibrid that locates in Ontario. All it needs is the approval from this government, and it hasn't got it. Why is this government dragging its heels on that approval?

Hon. George Smitherman: Firstly, I want to say to the honourable member that through the investment of dozens and dozens of different entrepreneurs, totalling, I think, about 130 or 140 distinct entrepreneurs, many more than 1,000 megawatts of renewable energy have come online in the province of Ontario to the tune of an investment of several billion dollars.

So, again I say to the honourable member, to characterize the province of Ontario as a laggard in this regard is rather offensive. It does a disservice to the extraordinary investment and entrepreneurial effort that has been made.

On the point at hand with respect to a specific proponent, there are a variety of options and offers that are made available to tie a permit for a certain amount of generation to manufacturing. That's why I have already acknowledged twice and will for the third time that we do think that there are opportunities to apply lessons from, for example, Quebec, and I'm looking at the policy to be able to do that at this very moment.

ELECTRONIC SURVEILLANCE PROGRAM

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: My question is to the Minister of Community Safety. Minister, there are several changes

being made to the policy and procedures of the electronic monitoring program in your ministry. One of these changes will remove the requirement of electronic surveillance resource officers to conduct a home visit when completing technological reports for the suitability of installing the equipment. These home visits require a ministry employee an opportunity to actually inspect the residence where an offender will serve a house arrest while on a conditional sentence and under supervision of your ministry. Your new policy will instead have an ESRO conducting interviews over the phone to prepare their technological report, trying to confirm the identity of someone they can't even see.

There's no way that an ESRO can confirm the actual identity of the individual they are speaking with on the phone. Furthermore, with nobody from your ministry making home visits, there's nothing stopping these individuals from operating a meth lab, a grow op or any other criminal activity from their residence.

These foolish changes are simply negligent cost-cutting measures that water down a viable public safety program. Will the minister commit today to backing away from these policy changes and—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: That's a legitimate question. Let's be very, very clear and let's make it in terms that everybody can understand, and let me be very, very clear that our number one priority is community safety and it will continue to be community safety. That is why our policies and operational decisions will always be aimed at putting community safety first.

Technology allows staff to remotely access equipment suitability. Staff previously had to take precious time in order to do this monitoring. It's being done in a more effective and full manner.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Minister, I don't agree with you.

As you're aware, these poorly thought out changes will take effect December 1 of this year, just two weeks away. Without question, they will negatively impact the safety of Ontario's communities and add more unnecessary work for Ontario's police services.

Electronic monitoring is not a new technology and has been utilized to effectively supervise offenders in other provinces and jurisdictions. All successful programs in other jurisdictions require home assessments of offenders by electronic surveillance resource officers and a public education about the program in the community. We are taking steps backwards here in this province by eliminating home assessments.

Will the minister agree to rescind the changes planned and conduct a comprehensive, independent review of the electronic monitoring program in our province?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Before any decisions are made, they're well thought out and well researched. They are not knee-jerk-reaction decisions.

This clearly will provide for a higher level of monitoring. It will allow us to use our human resources in a more effective manner, and it will ensure that our number one priority is indeed our number one priority, that being community safety for the people of Ontario.

AGRICULTURAL LABOUR POLICY

Mr. Peter Kormos: To the Premier: Since 1995, Conservative and Liberal governments in this province have denied agricultural workers the right to join unions and bargain collectively. Yesterday, the Ontario Court of Appeal ruled against this government's policy and struck down the offending legislation as unconstitutional. Will the Premier assure Ontarians that the government will not appeal this decision and that it will finally agree to end the exclusion of thousands of agricultural workers from the Labour Relations Act of Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I welcome the question. What I can say is that we will take a very close look at the decision. We are determined to find fairness, both for our farmers and for farm workers. So we will draw careful guidance from the decision just rendered, but we'll take our time to do that, as I know my colleague would want us to do.

1100

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Peter Kormos: We're talking about thousands of agricultural workers, workers working in some of the most dangerous and hardest-working and lowest-paid jobs in this province. We're talking about their constitutional rights as determined by the Ontario Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court of Canada. You don't have all the time in the world, Premier. The Court of Appeal gave you but 12 months to remedy this; otherwise, your legislation will become null and void. Why won't you accept your responsibility to these workers and accept your responsibility to enforce and uphold their constitutional rights?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I always appreciate my colleague's passion on these issues. He speaks of responsibility, and that's a good word. One dimension to our responsibility on this side of the House is that, in the face of a decision rendered by the Ontario Court of Appeal, we should just take at least a few days to carefully consider that and its implications. My friend is absolutely right: We've been given 12 months to address this, and I think we should take at least a few days to look at the decision itself and make sure we fully understand it.

POLICE

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: My question is to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. It goes without saying that for many of my constituents, community safety is a top priority. Today the Police Association of Ontario is visiting the Legislature, and I think it's appropriate to recognize the contributions of Ontario's police officers and the civilian members of our police

forces. The men and women of Ontario's municipal police forces and OPP lay their lives on the line daily to ensure that we live in the safest communities possible. I know that every member of this House recognizes the PAO's important contributions, but recognition is not enough. Our government must ensure that police have the personnel, equipment, training and support required to safely and effectively do their job.

Minister, please explain to this House the support this government has provided to Ontario's police to date and what we will be doing moving forward to ensure that police are able—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Ontario's communities are safer because of our excellent police services and our commitment to work with the Police Association of Ontario as an active partner. So, at the advice of the Police Association of Ontario, we continued funding the community policing partnership program and extended that funding into perpetuity. At the advice of the Police Association of Ontario, we worked at a Safer Communities policing program, hiring 1,000 new additional officers and 200 OPP officers, and extended the funding in perpetuity as well. We continue to work with our policing partners, including the PAO, in a number of ways to ensure that they have the tools needed to do their job, because at the end of the day, as I said earlier, community safety is our number one priority.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Thank you for that response, Minister. I'm pleased to hear our government has a deep appreciation for the fine work done by our Ontario police in keeping our communities safe. Effective partnerships at all levels are needed to truly protect our communities. When communities, schools and police and all levels of government work together, we have the safest communities possible.

I know that it was with great fanfare that the federal government, in their 2006 election platform, promised to put 2,500 officers on the streets of Canada. It's one thing to promise and quite another to actually deliver. I've heard that, unfortunately, Ontario received roughly only 30% of what was originally promised and that the program is only temporary. In addition, I've heard from many members of the policing community and from my community at large that this program does not provide what is needed for our municipalities to plan long-term.

Can the minister explain—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: The member brings up a very, very important point. Are partnerships important? Yes, partnerships are important in community safety. Do we have an absent partner in all of this? The answer is, yes, we have an absent partner. That partner is the federal government that promised a 2,500-police-officer recruitment program and didn't deliver on that. As a result, Ontario got shortchanged.

So I made a commitment to our policing partners that we would be an active participant in lobbying the federal government for Ontario's fair share. We're not getting it. We will argue with the federal government; we will advocate on behalf of the people of Ontario and for our policing partners.

Let me tell you what Larry Molyneaux, the president of the PAO, says: "The PAO continues to strongly"—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

CORONER'S INQUEST

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Minister, two years ago, Mr. Steven Huc Minh Chau killed his wife, Shao-Fang Liang, and two children, Vivian and Ivan. He was recently found by the court to be not criminally responsible for their deaths due to his mental state at the time. As you may know, in a press conference this morning Mr. Chau has asked for a coroner's inquest into the deaths of his wife and children. This has been supported by members of Mr. Chau's family, by members of the medical community and by members of the Chinese Canadian community, many of whom are here in the gallery today.

Minister, there is a widespread view that this tragedy could have been averted. Despite concerns expressed by Mr. Chau's family to his physicians that his medical condition was worsening daily before the tragedy, nothing was done to stop it. Serious questions have arisen from this matter. Will you please call a coroner's inquest—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Obviously, there isn't a person in the House who doesn't have a great deal of sympathy for this situation and any other situation—but I think the member is asking for me to invoke section 22, when there is a process in place that has to be carried out before I would have the power to invoke section 22. I encourage everyone connected to this to ensure that they follow that process. That begins with the local coroner, and if that decision isn't an agreeable decision, they have the opportunity to appeal to a regional coroner. Then, if they are not satisfied with that decision, they can go to the chief coroner, because the coroners are in the best place to make that decision.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: The minister is quite right in saying I am making the request under section 22 of the Coroners Act. In addition, Mr. Chau himself has asked, through his lawyer and in a personal note that he has also written, because he recognizes there are very serious medical and legal issues arising out of this case, of general application, that need to be dealt with both for the protection of the public and for the people suffering from major mental illness in this province. There is no question that Mr. Chau's family was failed by both the Ontario system of mental health and by the legislation,

and that there's something that needs to be done about this.

Minister, I ask you, will you please use your discretion in this very important case to deal with these issues that need to be resolved for the safety of the public and for the people involved?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: First of all, let me inform the member clearly and the people who are in the gallery, people who are truly concerned, that there is a process in place. Before section 22 is invoked, that process has to be gone through; so it's at the local level, the regional level and then at the chief coroner's level.

Let me tell you, no other government has invoked section 22 because—and let me quote Bob Runciman on December 12, 1995, when he said, "It's not within my area of responsibilities to direct the chief coroner to undertake such an investigation, but I will certainly make him aware of the member's concerns." I am asking the member to ensure that everyone understands that there is a process in place, that the coroner is the best person to make that decision, and that the decision will be based on public safety.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. The minister has changed the eligibility criteria for the temporary care assistance program, stressing out thousands of grandparents raising their grandkids.

Last week, I visited with grandparents in London, Hamilton, Cambridge, Kingston and Bancroft. We all reviewed the new eligibility criteria, and they sadly admitted they no longer qualify for TCA. However, the minister's parliamentary assistant said in the London Free Press that "whoever is eligible today will be eligible tomorrow."

Will the minister follow her PA's lead and also pledge, despite her new rules, that the grandparents eligible today will be eligible tomorrow?

1110

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Thank you very much for the question. I know that the member is very persistent about the temporary care assistance. Again, we all here in the House thank the grandparents, and not only the grandparents, because this program is offered also to a neighbour, to a family member, to friends, so we thank those who are offering to help children in need. We thank them today for doing that.

We continue to offer support to those who are stepping in to look after children who are in need, and we will continue to offer that service. I'm saying to the grandparents today, and to the neighbours and friends who are helping, that the rules that are applicable today are the rules that will be applicable—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary.

Mr. Paul Miller: I must say that the minister continues to stand up in this House and thank grandparents, and then she cuts them off, so I'm a little confused.

Last week, I met with dozens of grandparents raising their grandkids across southern Ontario who have already been cut off from temporary care assistance. The minister talks an interesting line, but the reality is that the cut-offs have already begun—Hamilton and Ottawa—already deemed grandkids being raised by their grandparents ineligible.

Will the minister tell us which municipality is next, or will she do whatever it takes to ensure that those grandchildren eligible today are eligible tomorrow?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Again, I'm saying that the rules that are applicable today are the rules that will be applicable tomorrow. We will continue. Again, I'm repeating the member from Hamilton: "Blow the whistle on grandparents."

So we reviewed the application of the rules and, yes, there were some municipalities that were not applying the rules as they should have been. I'm saying again that the people who are looking after children who are in need today will continue to receive the support that this government is offering, because we've increased the budget every year. We're increasing the budget, and we will continue to support those who are stepping in to take care of children, and I thank them today.

MÉTIS NATION OF ONTARIO

Mr. Kim Craitor: My question is to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. Minister, this past Sunday, November 16, the Métis people of Ontario celebrated the life of Louis Riel, honouring his contributions to the Métis as a people and to Canada as a whole.

The Métis people played an instrumental role in the shaping of Canada, and they continue to work hard to share their culture, music, traditions and knowledge of the environment with their fellow Canadians.

According to the 2006 census, 73,000 people identify themselves as Métis in Ontario, making our province home to the highest population increase among the Métis people in Canada.

Minister, I know that since taking your new portfolio, you've been working hard to improve relationships between the government and the aboriginal communities in Ontario. Can you please describe the specific inroads you've made with the Métis people in Ontario?

Hon. Brad Duguid: It was my honour on the weekend to gather with the Métis Nation of Ontario to honour Louis Riel. This has traditionally been an event that comes with a fair amount of anger and frustration, and rightfully so. The Métis Nation has not been recognized, generation after generation, government after government, in this province. Even their mere existence has not been recognized, let alone their culture and the huge contribution they've made to our province and our country.

On Sunday, that anger gave way to celebration. I was honoured to be present at that ceremony because the very next day, I had the honour of signing a framework agreement with the Métis Nation of Ontario, with President

Gary Lipinski. For the first time in the history of this province, the Métis Nation of Ontario is—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Kim Craitor: Minister, your predecessor Michael Bryant was praised by the Métis leadership, particularly by the past president of the Métis Nation Tony Belcourt. Perhaps the minister might inform the House what other First Nation leaders are saying today. As well, Ontario has made relationship building and real progress with our aboriginal partners a major priority, and perhaps the minister would like to elaborate on that.

Like Métis people throughout the province, the Métis community in the Niagara region is working hard to increase their economic opportunities and improve their quality of life.

Minister, can you provide us with some more information on the framework agreement and how it will affect the lives of Métis people throughout Ontario and in my constituency?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'd be pleased to provide that information, but first I want to recognize the work of my predecessor in putting together a good part of this early work on this very historic framework. He has done a tremendous job in helping to create a new relationship with our First Nations, Métis and Inuit people, and this framework goes a long way to changing that relationship.

The Ontario government and the Métis Nation of Ontario will now be working in a new and collaborative relationship that will lead to improving the well-being of Métis children, families and communities, that will protect and promote the distinct culture, identity and heritage of the Métis people. Through this framework, we'll be able to encourage economic opportunities and recognize and respect Métis traditions, structures and institutions.

Every once in awhile in our political life, we get to be part of something that's historic and very meaningful. I'm pleased that I've had—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

DRIVER LICENCES

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. Minister, I'd like to raise an issue of what I consider to be driver licences obtained through fraudulent means or for fraudulent reasons. Since February, residents in my riding have received over 100 driver's licences with names and faces other than theirs, which have been mailed to their addresses. Since this became public, they have been bringing them to me—in the last two weeks, over eight alone. One lady has received four in the last two weeks. She has received 20 to 25 since February. I'm going to be sending over eight licences that have been received in the last week. My staff tells me that since yesterday some more have arrived at my office. This is causing a great deal of concern to residents in my riding.

There must be a way of tracking this fraud down and stopping it, Minister. Can you assure this House that there's something you will be doing, starting today?

Hon. James J. Bradley: The answer is, yes, there is.

I want to first of all commend the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke for bringing this matter to my attention assiduously. As a result of bringing it to my attention, investigations have been taking place with a view to overcoming the problem.

I think the member realizes that there have been some other instances where people who want to avoid Drive Clean change their address and then they change the address back, for instance.

The Ministry of Transportation's investigative force is working with the Ministry of the Environment's investigative force at the present time, looking at each of these cases, and bringing in prosecutions when they are justified. I want to thank the member for his ongoing interest in this and assure him that we are taking very strong action to overcome what is a serious problem.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you, Minister, but I think it's a lot more than an environment issue; it's more than just about Drive Clean.

The widow who has received 25 licences since February lives alone on a rural road. Not only has she received licences, but she is receiving notices from the 407 to pay her fines. She has also received notice to renew licence plates which are not hers but which belong to these fraudulent licences. She also found in her mailbox all kinds of cards, obtained because of those driver licences, allowing some of these people to vote in the last federal election.

This goes way beyond environment. This goes way beyond emissions testing. This is a big problem, either in MTO or somewhere, when one person can receive 25 licences issued to 25 different people.

We have to do something to stop this so that this lady can sleep at night. It's affecting her health. Her doctor has put her on medication because of this.

You live on a rural route, you're wondering who—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister.

1120

Hon. James J. Bradley: My friend is absolutely right in this case, as he is in so many cases when he raises issues in the House. I want to assure him that we have been working with the Ministry of the Environment on this. Both the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Transportation have officials who deal with matters of fraud. Also, we are in consultation with the Ontario Provincial Police and other police services across the province to determine where prosecutions can take place.

I'm also informed that we've found a technology solution that we believe is a sound interim measure to reduce this type of fraud, and this is something we will begin implementing right away. We're also exploring broader policy solutions to address what I think the member has identified as a very significant problem. So I

thank him for bringing it to the attention of the House and to my personal attention, and we're taking action.

DENTAL CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée.

Today, a report from the Ontario Dental Association calls for action to protect the dental health of Ontario's children and families. Why hasn't the government created a provincial dental care plan as promised during the 2007 provincial election and again in last year's budget?

Hon. David Caplan: I understand that the Ontario Dental Association has released a report today. I look forward to reviewing the report with my colleagues the Minister of Children and Youth Services and the Minister of Health Promotion, because we all know that good oral health leads to better overall health. That's why our government is spending \$69.2 million annually to provide low-income Ontarians with dental services through the social assistance system. We're spending an additional \$11.9 million to provide urgent dental care treatment to low-income families through the children in need of treatment program, and that's a 15% increase since 2004. In March, the Premier announced a three-year, \$135-million dental plan that will extend support to even more low-income families.

I look forward to expanding on the answer in the supplementary.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Here's what the Ontario Dental Association has to say about the children in need of treatment program. They say, "It is the strongly held view of the Ontario Dental Association that the children in need of treatment program is counterproductive and unfair to the children of this province, particularly to low-income children."

Ontarians want access to a dental plan that provides preventive dental care for all Ontario children, regardless of income, and for low-income families regardless of their current employment status. Why were teeth excluded from medicare? It's the only body part that's not in. It is incomprehensible. Rather than give Ontarians false hope, will the minister commit to bringing in a truly comprehensive dental care plan today?

Hon. David Caplan: I'm not sure I understand the rhetoric that's behind the question. In fact, this government is not only providing true hope, but is providing additional resources that low-income Ontarians are able to receive. In fact, over 30,000 low-income children are receiving that kind of support, and I think the member would want to acknowledge that absolute fact.

We're going to continue to work with public health units, community health centres, dentists and dental hygienists to deliver prevention and treatment services for low-income families, and especially for children. Part of our plan to help children lead healthy and active lives is the doubling of student nutrition program funding, banning junk food and trans fats from schools, developing new, healthy nutritional guidelines, 20 minutes of

daily physical activities in schools, and Eating Well Looks Good on You, working with David Rocco.

There are a number of different programs, but, importantly, additional resources have been provided—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question.

MUNICIPAL FINANCES

Mr. Jeff Leal: My question today is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Minister, you announced the findings from the provincial-municipal fiscal and service review, which was good news for property taxpayers in municipalities across Ontario.

The city of Peterborough will benefit particularly from the court security upload because it has a court that services many surrounding municipalities, as well as my own, without receiving any funding from these other municipalities. But, Minister, the report was a little vague about how these costs will be paid for by the province and what the actual benefit will be to municipalities that fund court security. The upload of court security costs is good news, but my municipality, the city of Peterborough, needs to know the details in order to plan for the future. Will the minister tell us today about the details of this upload?

Hon. Jim Watson: I'm particularly proud of the work that AMO and the city of Toronto, along with my colleague the Minister of Finance, conducted with the fiscal and service delivery review. Court security upload was one of the top priorities of the municipal sector. They kept saying, "Why is it that court security costs for provincial courthouses are borne by municipal property taxpayers?" So we have agreed that the upload will begin and it will be phased in over a seven-year period. It will save municipal taxpayers \$125 million.

I want to quote the Association of Chiefs of Police and the Ontario Association of Police Services Boards when they said, on October 31, "Ontario's police leaders and police services boards today welcomed the commitment by the government of Ontario to fulfill its responsibility to pay for court security and prisoner transportation costs...." We are proud to work with the police association, the chiefs of police, and our colleagues the Attorney General and the Minister of—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Leal: Thank you, Minister, for clarifying a very important issue. The downloading of court security costs onto the municipality was an unfair burden placed on communities across the province that was ignored by previous governments until now. This downloading took funding from community priorities such as social programs, infrastructure and policing. Now our government has put in place a reversal of this burden for municipalities, and my constituents would like to know how this is going to affect our police force.

In my community, we're more than appreciative of the service provided by our police and are happy that this review will free up more of those resources and keep our

communities safe. I understand that through the phased-in uploading approach, my community, the city of Peterborough, and others in Ontario will save \$125 million by 2018 for court security. Can you please outline what policing benefits my community and others across the province will be able to see with this new uploading of costs?

Hon. Jim Watson: I'd refer this to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I thank the member for a very, very important question. Municipalities, along with their policing partners, the police association or chiefs of police, will be best able to decide where these newly freed-up dollars should go. Some municipalities may choose to hire new front-line police officers. Others may choose to invest in police equipment or other community policing initiatives.

You see, the beauty of this upload is that it's going to free up money for municipalities to invest in those priority areas that Larry Molyneux and the Police Association of Ontario have—working in concert with each other. That's what community safety is all about: collaboration and partnerships.

EDUCATION LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is to the Premier. It is day 11 of the York University strike, Premier. Fifty thousand students are missing out on their education. The holiday break is coming fast, exams have been scheduled, and students are losing important class time.

Before anyone gets into any discussion of back-to-work legislation, is the Premier willing to use the moral suasion inherent in his office to encourage both sides to arrive at a solution expeditiously and get students back into their lecture halls and striking employees back to work?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Let me just say that I think it's in everybody's interest that this matter be resolved at the earliest possible opportunity. I'm not sure there is anything of greater value in which we can invest in our young people than their education.

We've been strongly encouraging the sides to come to the table, to stay at the table and to resolve this as quickly as possible. We've also extended an offer, as I understand it, that if there's anything we might do by way of a conciliator or a mediator, something that can bring the sides together and accelerate a resolution, we are more than willing to do that.

Mr. Peter Shurman: That's good to hear, but so far nobody is talking. Words must be followed by actions, Premier.

I was at an anti-strike rally yesterday morning and spoke to hundreds of students. Thousands more are staying at home right now. They need action now, otherwise their semester, their year and their future plans may be a writeoff.

When will the Premier act, and how will he ensure that his action leads to a successful solution?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: This government cherishes our education system, and we have a labour relations record that is second to none. We continue to build on that, to have stable and balanced labour relations.

As the Premier said, we do have assistance that is available in the form of mediators to the parties. We want to make sure that the parties come to the table and can resolve their differences.

We highly respect the collective agreement process. It is the best process. We asked them to double their efforts, to come to the table, so that we can get those students back into the classroom and get everybody working at York University.

1130

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. Minister, you will know that the Chiefs of Ontario are meeting this week in Toronto in order to discuss the Mining Act reforms. Clearly, they're saying the extension that you granted them in regard to the consultation is not enough.

If a decision is made at the Harbour Castle inn tomorrow or today that they want more time, will you accept that recommendation and extend the time for consultation beyond what you have done now?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Certainly I am very pleased to report to the House that with the very significant involvement of my colleague the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, we were able to come to an agreement with our First Nation partners to extend the consultation period to January 15, 2009. We do think that it is vital to take greater time to build a greater level of support among First Nations so we can bring forward better legislation.

It's important to note that we have some strong support from very significant First Nation leaders. Let me read a quote: "The Ontario government's decision to extend consultations on the Mining Act in order to properly consult with First Nations is further evidence that the government understands the importance of improving relationships with First Nations in Ontario," said Ontario Regional Chief Angus Toulouse of the Chiefs of Ontario. "The understanding and respect that today's decision clearly shows will result in a better future, not only for First Nations, but for Ontario as a whole."

So there's very significant support.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Minister, the only place that the First Nations are in agreement with you is that they want the Mining Act changed and they want revenue sharing, clearly, and that's what Chief Angus Toulouse and others are telling you.

The problem is that—let me explain the geography to you—these are landlocked communities. These are communities that have no road access. These are communities that have very poor infrastructure. They need the time to do the consultation with the people within the

communities in order to give you the green light to go ahead with whatever changes are made. You can't do that by January 15. If you're trying to get from Attawapiskat to Fort Severn, you have to come back down to Timmins, go to Thunder Bay and fly back up again.

I'm going to ask you the question: If they come forward today with a recommendation to extend the deadline beyond January 15, will you accept the recommendation and do what's right by the First Nations of this province?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: The fact is that we have come to an agreement with First Nations on the January 15 consultation period. Indeed, we did extend the consultation period to November 12 and entered into discussions. Again, my colleague the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs was very involved in these discussions to extend the deadline.

We are receiving significant support for this. I want to read another quote, if I may, from Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians Grand Chief Randall Phillips: "I am supportive of the recent action taken by Ministers Duguid and Gravelle and the Ontario government to ensure that a more collaborative approach is used to address First Nations' concerns regarding the proposed revisions to the Mining Act.... Although it's ... not a perfect process"—we'll acknowledge that—"this opportunity to develop a better working relationship with the Ontario government on issues that directly affect First Nation communities is a step in the right direction."

We're very pleased with the work that has been done. I'm very grateful to my colleagues for their help in the consultation. We're pleased to extend the consultation period.

CONSERVATION

Mr. Jim Brownell: My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, my riding of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry is home to a number of beautiful parks and significant natural conservation areas. These parks are home to wildlife and are places my constituents can visit to reconnect with nature.

One of these parks is Charlottenburgh park, which is managed by the Raisin Region Conservation Authority. I know that you have a special fondness for this park, for you visited it this summer.

This government has pursued a number of initiatives to strengthen this park and protect natural wildlife. It is my understanding that we are now assisting the Raisin Region Conservation Authority to plant 375 new and varied species of trees within the park. Minister, can you explain the benefits of this initiative?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I'd like to say thank you to the member for his complete and utter support for conservation initiatives in his riding, as to many other members who are working with us.

As you know, we have a lot of forests in northern Ontario. We're not so fortunate in southern Ontario. So we've made a commitment to plant 50 million trees, but

obviously we can't do that on our own, so we're working very closely with the Ontario stewardship program. The conservation authorities are absolutely pivotal to helping us manage these 50 million trees in terms of programs; also Trees Ontario and Evergreen.

We all know the benefit of trees. They're healthy, they provide shade, they clean our air; aesthetically, they make a difference. But also, we know that by working with our farming community, we can make a significant difference, and so by working with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, we also are ensuring that we're planting sufficient trees and working through their stewardship program. So I thank—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. The time for question period has ended.

DEFERRED VOTES

PHOTO CARD ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LES CARTES-PHOTO

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We have a deferred vote on third reading of Bill 85.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1135 to 1140.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Duncan, Dwight	Munro, Julia
Albanese, Laura	Dunlop, Garfield	Naqvi, Yasir
Arnott, Ted	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	O'Toole, John
Bailey, Robert	Fonseca, Peter	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Balkissoon, Bas	Gravelle, Michael	Phillips, Gerry
Bartolucci, Rick	Hardeman, Ernie	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bentley, Christopher	Hoy, Pat	Ramal, Khalil
Bradley, James J.	Hudak, Tim	Rinaldi, Lou
Broten, Laurel C.	Jaczek, Helena	Runciman, Robert W.
Brown, Michael A.	Jeffrey, Linda	Sandals, Liz
Brownell, Jim	Jones, Sylvia	Scott, Laurie
Bryant, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Shurman, Peter
Cansfield, Donna H.	Leal, Jeff	Smith, Monique
Caplan, David	MacLeod, Lisa	Smitherman, George
Carroll, Aileen	Mangat, Amrit	Sousa, Charles
Chan, Michael	Martiniuk, Gerry	Takhar, Harinder S.
Chudleigh, Ted	Matthews, Deborah	Watson, Jim
Colle, Mike	Mauro, Bill	Wilkinson, John
Craitor, Kim	McGuinty, Dalton	Wilson, Jim
Crozier, Bruce	McMeekin, Ted	Witmer, Elizabeth
Delaney, Bob	McNeely, Phil	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dickson, Joe	Meilleur, Madeleine	Yakubski, John
Dombrowsky, Leona	Milloy, John	Zimmer, David
Duguid, Brad	Moridi, Reza	

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed?

Nays

Bisson, Gilles	Horwath, Andrea	Prue, Michael
DiNovo, Cheri	Kormos, Peter	Tabuns, Peter
Gélinas, France	Marchese, Rosario	
Hillier, Randy	Miller, Paul	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):
The ayes are 71; the nays are 10.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion passed. Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): This House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1144 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome, in the west members' gallery, the member from the 35th and 36th Parliament representing York Mills and the 37th Parliament from Don Valley West, David Turnbull. David, welcome back to Queen's Park today.

Mr. Jim Brownell: I would like to welcome to this House John and Susan Towndrow from my riding of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry. They are certainly tireless workers in my riding for many different causes. Welcome.

MEMBER'S WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Mr. Bruce Crozier: It seems as though there aren't any other guests to introduce, so I'm going to take this opportunity just to step slightly outside on a point of order: Since we're often separated from our loved ones on special days, I take this opportunity to wish my wife, Joan, a happy 47th wedding anniversary and to tell her that I love her.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We wish you congratulations, and I understand you're taking her to the top of the world for dinner this evening. Enjoy dinner at the CN Tower.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

RED RIBBON CAMPAIGN

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a pleasure to rise in the House and make a statement here to support the red ribbon campaign against drunk driving. It was celebrated just recently in Durham region. In fact, on December 4, Durham region's MADD chapter held its kickoff for the 2008 red ribbon campaign. Awareness of the event took place at Williamson GM Dealership in Uxbridge and at the Vos' independent grocer in Port Perry. I'd like to commend Troy Bramley, MADD vice-president and Durham's red ribbon coordinator, President Melissa Langworth, and all the volunteers who were part of the campaign.

MADD Canada reminds drivers that an average of four Canadians are killed and 196 are injured each day due to alcohol and drug-related incidents. The red ribbon campaign continues throughout the holiday season,

which we're all aware of. Their advice is that safe driving must be a year-round commitment, not just at this time of year, and it's a 24/7 commitment. Remember, the responsible thing is: If you drink, don't drive. Interestingly enough, this afternoon there will be a bill introduced by the Minister of Transportation, who will engage in many of these same comments.

So my advice to my constituents and my fellow members here is: If you drink, don't drive, but enjoy the holidays.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: I'm privileged to fight for the interests of thousands of at-risk children being raised by their grandparents.

What I've discovered about our system leaves a very sour taste. For example, when a related person, usually a grandparent, raises a child, they are eligible for about a quarter of the financial support that an unrelated caregiver receives. So if my neighbour steps up to the plate and fosters my grandchild, they'll receive \$900 plus per month per child. I quote some of the criteria from the children's aid society on the Toronto website:

"The daily board rate and coverage for other expenses such as clothing, medical and dental costs, school supplies, recreation etc. are provided to the foster parent to cover the costs of a child or youth's basic needs."

All of these things show "settled intent," but this government uses the phrase "settled intent" under temporary care assistance as a means to disqualify related persons, who receive a meagre \$231 a month for the first child and \$188 for every subsequent child under the temporary care assistance program.

The punitive nature of the new temporary care assistance eligibility criteria is shocking and creates an extremely stressful environment for the children and their grandparents. These caregivers are relieving your system of three quarters of the cost of putting the same children into foster care, yet this government attacks them at every turn.

At a time when there is a critical shortage of foster parents, when this government changes the daily routine at Queen's Park with a claim to make it more family-friendly, it embarks on a full-frontal attack on related family caregivers and their at-risk grandchildren.

The reason behind the government's ongoing—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

TASTES OF THE HILL FESTIVAL

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I recently attended the town of Richmond Hill's second annual Tastes of the Hill festival. Hundreds of residents gathered at the Richmond Green Sports Centre in my riding of Oak Ridges—Markham to indulge in this local, multicultural food festival. Although only two years old, it has quickly become a popular community tradition. Local restaurants, bakeries and stores provided an excellent oppor-

tunity to savour many delicious and diverse samplings—which were literally from soup to nuts—for two good causes: the York Central Hospital fund and Autism Ontario—York region chapter.

The Tastes of the Hill festival demonstrated once again that my constituency is one rich in diversity and great community spirit. I saw first-hand how the participants, their food offerings and the attendees represented many different countries. These included Japan, Italy, Iran, Thailand, China, India and Hungary, each adding its own magic touch to make this festival a great success. More than 40 participating businesses worked hard to prepare the many wonderful dishes, assisting in fundraising activities for charity.

I applaud the efforts of the Tastes of the Hill chairperson, Richmond Hill Regional Councillor Vito Spatafora, and the countless volunteers, local businesses and residents who all participated to make this fundraising celebration such a success. I look forward to the third Tastes of the Hill in Richmond Hill next year.

HABITAT FOR HUMANITY HALTON

Mr. Ted Arnott: Last Sunday afternoon I was glad to attend a very special new-home dedication for the Walala, Herman, and Kearsy-Smith families in Georgetown. Their three new homes were built by Habitat for Humanity Halton. This past summer, I was one of 1,183 volunteers who, together with Habitat staff, put in some 15,000 hours to build new homes for these deserving families.

Joining me at the dedication ceremony were Halton Regional Chair Gary Carr, Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette and Councillor Jon Hurst. Representing Habitat for Humanity Halton were Ed McMahon, chairman of the board; Kathrin Delutis, executive director; and other members of the board. As I'm sure they would all agree, the ceremony was both emotional and inspiring, as we shared in the excitement of these three families, who will soon enjoy the warmth of a home they can call their own.

Of course, it's also a story with deep and impressive global roots. Habitat for Humanity International has built more than 200,000 homes around the world, providing affordable, decent and safe housing to more than one million people in more than 3,000 communities.

Even more remarkable than the numbers I've given is the philosophy of this organization. It's about giving a hand up, not a handout. It is a partnership, a sharing of dignity, pride and determination, leading to accomplishment. It's about living up to the name of this organization and showing the humanity of our communities.

I know that all members of this House will join me in congratulating Habitat for Humanity Halton on a job well done.

SUSAN RYAN

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: It is with a heavy heart that I rise today and pay tribute to one of my constituents,

Susan Ryan, a beloved member of the Mississauga community whose life ended before its time.

In Mississauga, everyone knew Sue and everyone loved her. She was enthusiastic about everything that she did. We saw this when she was president of the Mississauga Real Estate Board and in her advocacy for property rights in Ontario. But her enthusiasm was most evident in the charity work she did in Mississauga. Sue volunteered at Interim Place, a shelter for abused women, and was a tireless advocate and fundraiser for Victim Services of Peel, Big Brothers and many local housing projects.

To say that Sue was a leader in our community would be an understatement. She dedicated her life to helping others and is someone who made a difference in the lives of many people.

On behalf of the residents of Mississauga-Brampton South, I would like to express my condolences to Sue's family and her many friends during this very difficult time. Sue's legacy will live on for many years to come.

1510

BRUCE MILLER

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased to rise today to welcome all the police officers who are here this afternoon from all the different police services, representing the PAO lobby day here at Queen's Park, and I want to thank them for their leadership under their new president, Larry Molyneaux, and their new CEO, Ron Middell.

I was pleased to have a visit this morning from Tim Vaillancourt, of the Midland Police Service, and Jim Christie, the vice-president of the OPPA. I know that Jim is in the audience today, along with Kim Williams from the OPPA. I'm pleased to see them here.

Today I really wanted to take a moment to pay tribute to the former CEO of the PAO, and that's Mr. Bruce Miller, who will be having some celebrations tonight on his retirement from the PAO. Bruce served from 2000 to 2008 in that position.

The membership increased in that time from 12,000 to 31,000 police officers, and in his time he brought in the Ontario Provincial Police Association and the Toronto Police Service under the body of the PAO.

Bruce had a real knack, in his position, to work with all political parties, and I can't tell you how much time Bruce has spent at committee hearings on any bill, whether a private member's bill or a government bill, that affected the policing community.

I personally want to thank Bruce for his work on the ignition interlock and the blood sampling bills that I had put through the Legislature as well.

I wish Bruce all the best, and many years of health and happiness in his retirement.

MUNICIPAL FINANCES

Mr. Joe Dickson: I rise in the House today to express my thanks to the Honourable Dwight Duncan and the Ministry of Finance for the Ajax and Pickering municipal

and Durham regional grants received from the Investing in Ontario Act.

Ajax will benefit from a grant of just over \$4 million, which will go toward the new LEED-certified operations and environment centre, and construction will start this spring. This LEED building is in addition to new Ajax LEED fire hall opened by Ontario Minister Gerretsen last month.

Major road repairs to Ravenscroft are also under way, moving it up for repair by several years with provincial money.

Pickering Mayor Dave Ryan has just hosted his fourth annual Pickering mayor's gala on Saturday, raising money well into six figures, with some major funding again going to our Ajax-Pickering hospital. Mayor Ryan welcomed the province's \$3.9-million allocation, calling it a welcome infusion.

Regional Chair Roger Anderson has graciously accepted Durham region's funding of \$28.4 million to provide regional services in the municipalities, including Ajax and Pickering, with \$12 million allocated to roads and bridges and \$12 million for the Corbett Creek-Pringle Creek sewer plant, \$3.3 million for Durham transit, and \$1.1 million for Fairview seniors lodge.

ST. PETER KNIGHTS

Mr. Phil McNeely: Last week, the St. Peter Knights in my riding of Ottawa-Orléans dominated the National Capital Secondary School Athletics Association's tier 1 senior boys' football championship, downing the South Carleton Storms 32-7 to take the prize. Though they roughed it out in the pouring rain, the play of the Knights' offensive line was outstanding, and it was a great game. The championship is St. Pete's sixth at the NCSSAA since 1997. They won the city championship in 1997, 1998, 2003, 2004, 2005 and now, once again, this year.

The Knights head to Minto Field this Saturday to take on the Kingston Frontenacs in the provincial semi-final. The winner of that game will fight for the Ontario Federation of School Athletic Associations title. That game will take place here in Toronto, and if my hunch is right, the St. Peter Knights will be playing in that game.

As always, the Knights continue to demonstrate the value and importance of teamwork, perseverance and good sportsmanship, qualities that all honourable members can agree will be assets when the students move forward in their studies and, of course, in life.

I'd like to thank all the volunteers with the St. Peter Knights football team and across my riding of Ottawa-Orléans for their tireless efforts in support of amateur and minor sports.

Congratulations to the entire St. Peter Knights team and head coach Jim Mick for a great game and a well-deserved victory.

I look forward to many victories and, of course, some great football.

RED RIBBON CAMPAIGN

Mr. Khalil Ramal: On November 7, I attended the London chapter of MADD's 2008 red ribbon campaign.

Between November and January every year, people across Ontario are celebrating the holiday season, and Mothers Against Drunk Driving are asking Canadians to pledge their support for safe and sober driving by tying a red ribbon on their vehicles and key chains.

The red ribbon campaign is not only a public awareness initiative, it's also a time to remember the victims of impaired driving. Intervention is one of the key ways to prevent intoxicated driving, and MADD has used the opportunity to teach the young adults of Mother Teresa Catholic high school in London the dangers of drinking and driving. Impaired driving is a serious crime that is not to be tolerated.

Minister Bentley and I showed our support for Mothers Against Drunk Driving alongside representatives from the London police, city officials and the OPP. I would like to thank kindly Allstate Insurance for being the national sponsor for this initiative, and I would like to remind everyone to drink responsibly this holiday season.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ROAD SAFETY ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LA SÉCURITÉ ROUTIÈRE

Mr. Bradley moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 126, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act and to make consequential amendments to two amending acts / *Projet de loi 126, Loi modifiant le Code de la route et apportant des modifications corrélatives à deux lois modificatives.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The minister for a short statement?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I will make a statement during the time allocated for ministerial statements.

LAND TRANSFER TAX
AMENDMENT ACT, 2008LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR
LES DROITS DE CESSIION IMMOBILIÈRE

Mr. Brownell moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 127, An Act to amend the Land Transfer Tax Act / *Projet de loi 127, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les droits de cession immobilière.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The minister for a short statement.

Mr. Jim Brownell: This bill amends section 12 of the Land Transfer Tax Act so that when the Minister of Finance sends a notice of assessment or reassessment under this section to an agent or other representative of the assessed person, the minister shall, at the same time, send the notice to the assessed person. This will certainly be a cautionary alert to the assessed person so affected by the Land Transfer Tax Act, and I appreciate the residents of Sunrise Acres in my riding who have brought this to my attention.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES

ROAD SAFETY

Hon. James J. Bradley: I rise today to make a statement concerning the legislation that has been introduced in the House today. This is not in the statement itself, but I want to pay tribute to all of those who have contributed in some way to this legislation which is, I think, of great significance to the province of Ontario, particularly to those who are among families who have had some tragic circumstances surrounding them and also to those who are what we would refer to as our, I call them stakeholders, but they are advisers in the field of traffic safety in the province, and that includes representatives of our police services who are represented at this House today.

I'm pleased to report that our past legislation has proven effective. The new legislation will improve road safety in Ontario. The citizens of this province are fortunate to have had one of the best safety records in all the whole world. Our roads are among the safest in North America and have been every year, for more than a decade. Our laws and regulatory measures have toughened the province's seat belt, child car seat and booster seat rules. We have targeted street racers and other aggressive drivers and we have delivered needed changes to Ontario's drinking and driving laws. I introduced new legislation a few weeks ago that will, if passed by this Legislature, make it illegal to use hand-held communications and entertainment devices while driving.

1520

Yet, despite all our best efforts, motor vehicle collisions in Ontario still add up to about \$18 billion annually in health care and social costs. Every day, two people are killed and 10 more are seriously injured on Ontario's roads. Many of these collisions are, in fact, preventable. To combat some of the most persistent and dangerous driver behaviours, we need to make drivers understand the consequences.

Today I am introducing new legislation that will, if passed by the Legislature, keep our young drivers safe and get drunk drivers off our roads.

Statistics tell us that teen drivers are three and a half times more likely to be involved in a fatal collision than

drivers aged 30 to 34. Fourteen years ago, Ontario was the first jurisdiction in North America to introduce a comprehensive graduated licensing program. We have learned that inexperienced drivers have higher collision rates and need more time to learn and practise good driving skills that will help them survive a lifetime of driving. Under proposed regulations related to this legislation, we will extend the program from two years to three, to give novice drivers the time they need to get the right skills and to keep them safe. We will also work to keep children and youth safe by extending the existing nighttime teen G2 passenger restriction to an all-day passenger restriction. Teenage G2 drivers have a high rate of collisions when carrying other teenagers. We will restrict teenage G2 drivers from carrying more than one young passenger aged 19 and under at any time during the first year of G2. We will introduce escalating sanctions for repeat violations of graduated licensing system restrictions and convictions that carry demerit points and court-ordered suspensions. There will be a 30-day licence suspension for the first conviction, a 90-day suspension for the second conviction, and a return to the start of G1 for anyone who has a third conviction.

We are making progress when it comes to impaired drivers. Ontario had the lowest impaired driving offence rate in Canada in 2005, the last year for which we have complete statistics: 39% lower than the national average. But drinking and driving collisions still represent about one quarter of all traffic fatalities in Ontario. We must maintain a constant vigilance against drinking drivers. All US states now have zero blood alcohol concentration laws for drivers up to age 21, and these laws are cited as one of the most important reasons for a drop in young driver collisions. Our new legislation will extend the zero blood alcohol concentration requirement that currently applies to all drivers who are 21 or younger. We are going to give the police the tools they need to impound the vehicles of drivers who blow over the legal limit or refuse to take a breath test. Police would also be authorized to impound vehicles without an ignition interlock device when driven by persons who are required to use one. Research suggests that up to three quarters of suspended drivers continue to drive. To help deter this behaviour, we are giving the police the ability to impound the vehicles of more suspended drivers right at roadside.

There are real families that understand too well the painful loss of a loved one whose life was taken due to a collision.

I would like to take a moment once again to acknowledge the presence in the House today of Eleanor McMahon and the Perry and Mulcahy families, who have suffered unimaginable loss. Our deepest sympathies, and I know I speak for all members of the House, go out to these families. Yet, in spite of their pain, each of these families has made courageous efforts to turn their loss into an opportunity to prevent further tragedies on our roads so that others will not have to go through their tragic experience.

That is the hope of this legislation. "Safer roads" is a McGuinty government priority. This proposed legislation will, if passed by this Legislature, keep Ontario at the forefront of road safety. Our legislation and regulations will help keep our young and novice drivers safe. We will give them the right skills and experience they need to survive. Our proposed legislation will keep drinking and suspended drivers off our roads.

I encourage all members to support this legislation.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I am rising today to update members of the House on Exercise Trillium Response 2008, a simulated ice storm in Ontario's northwest. Trillium Response is the single largest disaster response exercise to be held in Ontario in recent memory. It will put Ontario's ability to respond to a major disaster to a very strenuous test.

Disasters are life-altering experiences. We all witnessed the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the tsunami in southeast Asia. If this simulated ice storm were real, it would endanger thousands of lives, shut down roads, knock out communications systems and critical infrastructure, and cause untold damage to the area's economy.

Emergency management is about mitigating the effects of disasters, preparing in case of disaster, responding quickly to save lives, minimizing economic impacts, and speeding up the recovery after a disaster. It is about getting the right people with the right resources to the right places at the right time.

Emergency Management Ontario, the office of the fire marshal and the Canadian Forces have developed a scenario that will test all elements of a rapid-response unit. At its peak, the exercise will involve over 1,500 participants from 40 different organizations, including provincial ministries, federal departments, municipalities, First Nations and non-governmental agencies.

The simulated disaster began last week with a first fictitious heavy snowfall accompanied by freezing rain. Then, events ramped up during the weekend with another, heavier snowfall and even more freezing rain that blanketed the area under a thick coat of ice. For example, the city of Thunder Bay and surrounding communities declared an emergency after being hit by over 40 centimetres of snow and 20 centimetres of freezing rain in under 48 hours. As the consequences of the simulated storm pileup, the exercise scenario will escalate, with other assets and resources, including one of the Canadian Forces' giant C-17 cargo airplanes, being pressed into action.

The twists and turns of this simulated disaster still need to remain confidential so that we can test the full effectiveness of our emergency response capacity.

The exercise will also test for the first time emergency response initiatives that the McGuinty government has introduced over the last year. That includes our Supply Chain and Logistics Coordination Alliance, a rapid-

response network of private sector companies working with the province of Ontario to ensure critical supplies are received in communities within hours of an emergency. I also hope that Trillium Response will be a reminder to the people of Ontario that we all have a personal stake in being prepared. The simple fact is that every Ontario household should have an emergency survival kit that would allow a family to be self-sufficient for the first 72 hours of a disaster.

1530

Emergency preparedness is only as strong as its weakest link. In preparing for an emergency, manuals and computer models can only take us so far. You need to get the boots and equipment on the ground in realistic situations to ensure we are prepared should a real emergency strike. That is what we are doing with Exercise Trillium Response.

I wish to thank all our partners in this historic exercise: the provincial ministries, the federal departments, the Canadian Forces, municipalities, First Nations, Confederation College in Thunder Bay, and non-governmental organizations. Together with our partners, Ontario is contributing to make Ontarians safer and more resilient in their homes, in their communities and across the whole province.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Statements? Responses?

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. John O'Toole: I can only say, right at the outset, that if there is anything that can be done to make our roadways safer, we are clearly in support of that. I think the record speaks for itself, if you look clearly at the work done by our transportation critic, Mr. Klees, who was unable to be here today. That's been his theme: making our roads safer. In fact, in complimenting the minister today—and he's quite generous in his compliments—he would thank Mr. Klees for taking the lead on the street racing issue some time ago, but more recently, in this legislation introduced today.

I can say on the record that a letter was sent by our leader, John Tory, after working with Mr. Klees, to Premier McGuinty on September 5, 2008, and this followed our leader, John Tory, speaking with the Mulcahy family and was considerate of their concerns about trying to take some action as soon as possible to make our roads safer. This is a reaction, a response to that. I'm a bit surprised that it wasn't rolled into the current bill, Bill 118, because that bill in itself is a Highway Traffic Act amendment, of which I, myself, am very supportive.

I would say that this seems like a bit of a photo op in some respects—the timing of it is—and I'm suspecting that we should have more hearings on it. I think this is what I would call for: to have public hearings and thorough dialogue, because there is some content within the bill that needs to be clarified.

In fact, I would put on the record as well that in the clippings this morning I was pleased to read that one of

the students, Trevor Mayoh, who is the president of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance and student leader at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, acknowledged the benefit of the legislation that may help in managing drivers' risk, but he believes that the proposed changes unfairly target youth. "It's looking at a problem," he says, "and going about solving it in a completely wrong way and a discriminatory way as well"—targeting young people. There are standards there on the blood alcohol issue as well, which are different than the general rule of .08.

So we're also concerned about the restrictions on the passengers in the vehicle. This could have influences for designated drivers, if young people are out socializing. It could affect young people who work. Some of the penalties here are a bit stiff. If they lost their licence for a minor Highway Traffic Act violation, they may not be able to get around, or in fact could lose their job. So I think that hearings on this will solve some of those small issues that we're raising.

Again, I want to remain committed to doing anything possible to make our roads safer in Ontario. I want to refer to the correspondence that I've addressed by our leader, John Tory, to the Premier, and to the work done by our critic Frank Klees. That's evidence that we're supportive. At the same time, it should be fairness for all. There should be one rule for all, and that's the fairness part of this bill. There needs to be a full debate, and I'm sure we will see that around the province.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'll just take a moment to comment on the comments made by the minister on Exercise Trillium Response 2008. We know that these disasters hit periodically in different jurisdictions around the world, and I think it's just good planning that we, as legislators, as municipal politicians and community leaders, make sure that those resources are in place to be able to accommodate any kind of disaster that would, in fact, occur.

I do want to thank the minister for at least acknowledging today the federal government. Usually, when he's up making comments he's criticizing the federal government for something. It is nice to know that the Canadian Forces were involved in this exercise. I think it's important that the Canadian Forces, which are a huge resource for Canada in times of emergency response, are acknowledged.

I think also we have to say once again that you never know when one of these things is going to happen. We think of the ice storm a few years ago, and we think of some of the floods we've had. When you think about the size of our province, we all have to be prepared.

I thank and congratulate all those who have made this response a success, and hopefully they'll never to have use it. That's what we're here for, but if we're prepared it's to everyone's betterment.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm pleased that this Legislature is responding to what I think is an issue that needed to be dealt with for some time in the province of Ontario, and that is the issue of how we're able to try to fix some of the problems that we have around making sure that our highways are safe and that young people—and older people quite frankly, my age and older—are responsible when it comes to their actions behind the wheel.

First of all, I want to say, as the critic for the New Democratic caucus, that we support the zero-tolerance-of-alcohol provisions in this legislation. We think that is a really good idea. It's something that we've long advocated for along with other people in this province, and we think that is definitely a step in the right direction.

That we have zero tolerance on the first offence of people who are speeding is a good idea. I think we need to have a bit of a discussion on this as a committee because I'm a big believer that you need to get this type of legislation into committee so that we can hear from people who may have opinions that are different from ours but may have some valuable advice in order to guide this Legislature towards doing what is the right thing.

One of things I want to talk about—and this is a little bit difficult because the Mulcahy family has had a tragic loss, as other people in this province had losses where young people have been killed behind the wheel or as passengers in those cars. But somehow or other, and I said this out in the media scrums, we can't legislate everything. There comes a point where individuals have to take responsibility. I know this is tough to say in this type of debate, but it's something that needs to be said: that we as legislators can't always be trying to legislate away what problems in our society are by legislation that comes through this House. We need to think about how we're able to make that happen.

I'll give one example. I think it was actually under the Conservative government. It might have been our own; I can't remember, but one of the provisions was that the owner of the vehicle be responsible for whom they lend the car to. Again, in the context of the Mulcahy family, I understand that's very difficult. I'm a parent, I'm a grandfather. I don't want to minimize the loss that this family has gone through. But we need to somehow or other—and sometimes we're totally out of control as parents, and I understand that—find ways of making sure that we are responsible as the owners of the vehicles, make sure that we take our responsibility when it comes to who is going to be driving our cars. I'm a parent. I've got two wonderful daughters, 31 and 36—we're lucky—and a grandson who's not driving yet; he's only two and a half months old. But it's sometimes tough because your kid comes to you, you're think they're responsible, and then they go out and do the wrong thing.

The next part becomes driver training. Maybe one of things that we've got to do through this bill is to take a look at how we prepare young people towards the responsibility of driving. I use the word "responsibility"

quite purposely because driving is not a right. It is not a right, and people should understand that driving is not a rite of passage at age 16. It's a privilege that we have as people in this society, and we need to make sure that young drivers at age 16, but quite frankly 51-year-olds like me, 30-year-olds and 75-year-olds, understand that this is not a right but a responsibility. We need to do all that we can to, first of all, make sure that the public understands that when you're driving a vehicle that's 2,000 to 5,000 pounds, it's an instrument that you can kill somebody with. It's a lethal weapon in the wrong circumstances. As drivers, we have to take our responsibilities, and that is everything from zero tolerance around alcohol, not using cellphones when we're driving in our car and talking on our BlackBerries—something that I stopped doing some years ago because of an incident that happened to me. Thank God nothing happened—and all those other distractions that happen when we're driving cars.

1540

Maybe one of the things that we need to take a look at in this legislation is how we can strengthen the driver training system so that drivers who are new—and I don't care if that person is 16 years old or 40 years old; the issue is the same—as part of their training, become very keenly aware that driving is not a right, it's a responsibility, and that we, as responsible citizens, aged 16 or 40, have to take that responsibility seriously. I think it needs to be incorporated within our training system. I would argue that's one of the things that we need to do, to take a look at the whole issue of the curriculum around training.

The other part is—and this is the final part that I'll end on—why do people break the law? We can write all the best laws we want in this province. They break the law because they think they can get away with it. It's an issue of, maybe there are not enough police on our roads. I know there's a limited amount of things that we can do in this Legislature, but it is an issue.

If the person gets behind the wheel and drinks and drives, if the person speeds on our highway or the person does reckless driving as a result of what—it's not just the thrill of driving the car fast or the truck fast; it's also the fear of not being caught. One of the things that we need to instill within people is that, yes, there are fines and there are penalties for bad driving, but there is a real possibility you can be caught. And we need to look at new technologies in order to assist the police to better patrol our highways. Maybe we've got to get into a debate about how we use some of these technologies to get there.

PETITIONS

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'd like to read this petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It was sent to me by a

number of individuals, particularly a constituent of mine, Cynthia Stopforth, from Longford Drive—actually, a neighbour of mine. It reads as follows:

“Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

“Whereas ‘day surgery’ procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to ‘day surgery’ procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed.”

I’m very pleased to sign and to support this petition, and to ask game Swapnil to carry it for me.

CHILD PROTECTION

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Whereas Ontario is one of the few provinces that does not have independent oversight of child welfare administration; and

“Whereas eight provinces now have independent oversight of child welfare issues, including child protection; and

“Whereas all provincial Ombudsmen first identified child protection as a priority issue in 1986 and still Ontario does not allow the Ombudsman to investigate people’s complaints about children’s aid societies’ decisions; and

“Whereas people wronged by CAS decisions concerning placement, access, custody or care are not allowed to appeal those decisions to the Ontario Ombudsman’s office;

“Therefore, be it resolved that we support the Ombudsman having the power to probe decisions and investigate complaints concerning the province’s children’s aid societies (CAS).”

I’ve signed this.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services, Madeleine Meilleur, has decided that grandparents caring for their grandchildren no longer qualify for temporary care assistance; and

“Whereas the removal of the temporary care assistance could mean that children will be forced into foster care; and

“Whereas the temporary care assistance amounted to \$231 per month, much less than a foster family would receive to look after the same children if they were forced into foster care;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately reverse the decision to remove temporary care assistance for grandparents looking after their grandchildren.”

I support this petition wholeheartedly and sign my name to it and give it to the page.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services has launched a blatant attack on our province’s grandparents raising their at-risk grandchildren by cutting off access to the temporary care assistance program;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Legislature call on the minister to overturn her July 2008 directives outlining the temporary care assistance program and grant all grandparents raising their at-risk grandchildren access to this much-needed financial support.”

I agree with this petition and affix my name to it.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Joe Dickson: I have a petition referencing the preservation of the Ajax-Pickering hospital.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Rouge Valley Health board reversed the 2006 announcement closing the maternity and pediatric services at the Ajax-Pickering hospital due to an overwhelming public outcry; and

“Whereas the Rouge Valley Health board of directors has recently approved closing the 20-bed mental health patient unit at the Ajax-Pickering hospital; and

“Whereas there remains further concern by residents for future maternity/pediatric closings, particularly with the new birthing unit at Centenary hospital that will see 16 new labour/delivery/recovery and postpartum (LDRP) birthing rooms and an additional 21 postpartum rooms opening this fall of 2008, even with the Ontario Ministry of Health’s largest-ever expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital; and

“Whereas there is a natural boundary, the Rouge Valley, that clearly separates the two distinct areas of Scarborough and Durham region;

"We, the undersigned, therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Central East Local Health Integration Network (CE-LHIN) and the Rouge Valley Health System (RVHS) board of directors review the Rouge Valley Health System makeup and group Scarborough Centenary hospital with the three other Scarborough hospitals; and

"Further, that we position Ajax-Pickering hospital within Lakeridge Health, thus combining all of our hospitals in Durham region under one Durham region administration."

I shall affix my signature to this and pass it to Sarah.

BEER RETAILING AND DISTRIBUTION

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I have another petition.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current system, practice and arrangement of retailing and distributing beer in the province of Ontario—and more specifically, the 'near monopoly' of The Beer Store—severely restricts the accessibility, convenience and choice for retail consumers of beer in Ontario; and

"Whereas The Beer Store 'near monopoly' is controlled by 'for-profit, foreign-owned companies' and these companies are not accountable to the people of Ontario, and these companies do not act in the best interests of the people of Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That legislation be introduced that will permit the retailing and distribution of beer through alternative and additional grocery and supermarket retail channels that will fairly compete with The Beer Store, thereby allowing an accessible, convenient, safe, well-regulated and environmentally responsible retailing environment for beer to become established in the province of Ontario."

I have signed this.

TOM LONGBOAT

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition from two outstanding citizens in the Lawrence Park area of Toronto, George and Judith Teichman. It's on behalf of the petition to recognize June 4 as Tom Longboat Day in Ontario.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Tom Longboat, a proud son of the Onondaga Nation, was one of the most internationally celebrated athletes in Canadian history;

"Whereas Tom Longboat was voted as the number one Canadian athlete of the 20th century by Maclean's magazine for his record-breaking marathon and long-distance triumphs against the world's best;

"Whereas Tom Longboat fought for his country in World War I and was wounded twice during his tour of duty;

"Whereas Tom Longboat is a proud symbol of the outstanding achievements and contributions of Canada's aboriginal people;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to recognize June 4 as Tom Longboat Day in Ontario."

I support this petition from the people of Lawrence Park and I affix my name to it.

1550

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jim Brownell: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents;

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relationships between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas section 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

As I agree with this petition, I shall sign it and send it to the clerks' table.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Looking forward to the petition from the member from Mississauga—Streetsville.

LUPUS

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you very much, Speaker. I have a petition here that has been sent to my seatmate, the member for Niagara Falls, on whose behalf I am reading it. It is from Deb Duval of Nesbitt Drive in Sudbury. It is addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly and it reads as follows:

"Whereas systemic lupus erythematosus is under-recognized as a global health problem by the public, health professionals and governments, driving the need for greater awareness; and

"Whereas medical research on lupus and efforts to develop safer and more effective therapies for the disease are underfunded in comparison with diseases of comparable magnitude and severity; and

"Whereas no safe and effective drugs for lupus have been introduced in more than 40 years. Current drugs for lupus are very toxic and can cause other life-threatening health problems that can be worse than the primary disease;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to assist financially with media campaigns to bring about knowledge of systemic lupus erythematosus and the signs and symptoms of this disease to all citizens of Ontario.

"We further petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide funding for research currently being undertaken in lupus clinics throughout Ontario."

On behalf of my seatmate, the member of Niagara Falls, I'm pleased to signed this petition and to ask page Jacqueline to carry it for me.

ONTARIO SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Mr. Mike Colle: You'll be glad to know that this is the last of the petitions I'll be issuing, since Bill 50 has been passed by this House yesterday. It's in support of the Provincial Animal Welfare Act, Bill 50.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the OSPCA Act has not been updated since 1919;

"Whereas Bill 50 would require all veterinarians to report suspected abuse and neglect, protecting veterinarians from liability;

"Whereas it would allow the OSPCA to inspect and investigate places where animals are kept;

"Whereas the bill would prohibit the training of animals to fight;

"Whereas Bill 50 would allow the OSPCA to inspect roadside zoos;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 50"—which they've done—"entitled the Provincial Animal Welfare Act, 2008...."

That's the last petition, and it shows petitions work. I'll affix my name to it.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mr. Bob Delaney: It's my day to be reading petitions on behalf of my colleagues. This one I join with my colleague from Newmarket-Aurora. It is a petition to the Parliament of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the legacy of Pope John Paul II reflects his lifelong commitment to international understanding, peace and the defence of equality and human rights;

"Whereas his legacy has an all-embracing meaning that is particularly relevant to Canada's multi-faith and multicultural traditions;

"Whereas, as one of the great spiritual leaders of contemporary times, Pope John Paul II visited Ontario during his pontificate of more than 25 years and, on his visits, was enthusiastically greeted by Ontario's diverse religious and cultural communities;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to grant speedy passage into law of the private member's bill ... entitled An Act to proclaim April 2 Pope John Paul II Day in Ontario."

I'm pleased to sign this and to recognize the contributions of the Polish community in sending it to me, and to ask page Brittney to carry it for me.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Are there any further petitions the members wish to read? The member for Eglinton-Lawrence.

ONTARIO SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Mr. Mike Colle: Sorry, I thought I had the last one, but I have one more from the people from Brooke Avenue and Fairlawn Avenue in the city of Toronto, in regard to support of Bill 50, the animal welfare act.

"Whereas the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act has not been updated since 1919;

"Whereas Bill 50 would require all veterinarians to report suspected abuse and neglect, protecting veterinarians from liability;

"Whereas it would allow the OSPCA to inspect and investigate places where animals are kept;

"Whereas the bill would prohibit the training of animals to fight;

"Whereas Bill 50 would allow the OSPCA to inspect roadside zoos;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 50, entitled the Provincial Animal Welfare Act, 2008, to protect our animal friends."

I support this petition, and this is the last one. Sorry.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

INCREASING ACCESS TO QUALIFIED HEALTH PROFESSIONALS FOR ONTARIANS ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 VISANT À ACCROÎTRE L'ACCÈS DES ONTARIENNES ET DES ONTARIENS AUX PROFESSIONNELS DE LA SANTÉ QUALIFIÉS

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 17, 2008, on the motion for third reading of Bill 97, An Act to increase access to qualified health professionals for all Ontarians by amending the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 / Projet de loi 97, Loi visant à accroître l'accès des Ontariennes et des Ontariens aux professionnels de la

santé qualifiés en modifiant la Loi de 1991 sur les professions de la santé réglementées.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm happy to have this opportunity to speak to this bill. It is not a particularly long bill; in fact, it's one single page. I'll read from it to let the public know what it says. It says the following:

"Duty of college

"2.1. It is the duty of the college to work in consultation with the minister to ensure, as a matter of public interest, that the people of Ontario have access to adequate numbers of qualified, skilled and competent regulated health professionals."

That's the extent of the bill.

It's informative because of what it says. It is the duty of the college—and that is the regulated health professions—to work in consultation with the minister, and what it's really saying is that they have not been doing that in the past and that there was an obligation on governments, this one in particular, to state in the act that those regulatory bodies have to work with the government. It suggests that they haven't been working with the government in the past and that the government has to rely on a bill to get them to do what it suggests they should be doing. I found that interesting. It suggests that in the past the government may have articulated a position with the regulatory bodies, and it's possible that those regulatory bodies said no. It's really hard to believe that that's the case, because I know that the College of Physicians and Surgeons has been increasing the number of IMGs, international medical graduates, over a period of time. They've done that under the Tories, probably under some duress, to be sure, and they've done it under the Liberals, because we've seen a number of increases in the past. I think we went from 40 under the old Tory regime to approximately 250 today under the Liberal regime. That's why the Liberals can say, "We've multiplied IMGs by hundreds"—simply because they went from 40 to 250. It's not a whole lot, because there are thousands of international medical graduates. Still, when you consider where they were to where they have gotten to, it's a serious increase, I have to admit. The College of Physicians and Surgeons obviously has been responding to pressure from government, so I am puzzled as to why we need to put it in the form of a bill. I wanted to say that, because I found it intriguing.

It does say to those regulatory bodies, "From now on, I don't want to have to tell you, because now it's your duty to do what we tell you." Okay, that's fine. I think it's a useful thing. If regulatory bodies have been protecting their professions and have decided that they would block new entrants for whatever reason, I think it is the duty of government to oblige these regulatory bodies—that it is their duty to respond to governments when they tell them. I think it's a good thing.

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Having listened in part to the parliamentary assistant when she gave her speech, however, I gathered that her push was to get more international medical graduates to

be practising, rather than the other regulated health professionals. That was my sense, and it was the sense of our critic as well, that that's what the government is pushing. They're pushing more international medical graduates than they are the other professions. That's what I got from the speech made by the parliamentary assistant from Etobicoke-Lakeshore. If that was not the case, perhaps she or others could tell me that I and others might have been wrong in this impression.

We say to the government, we do have to focus on the other regulated professions and not just the international medical graduates, for a variety of good reasons.

By the way, in a related way, I want to say that we do have a lot of international medical graduates in this country. I know that many are in the US and Europe as well. I do have to state a concern. They have come to this country on the promise that they would get jobs, and for the last 15 years they haven't been getting those jobs. How sad that is. I have attacked the federal government on a number of occasions because it was their responsibility to bring people and then to tell them, "Here's how you get the job for which you were trained and which you thought you would get."

For years, I've been attacking the federal government, both Liberal and Conservative—the Liberal and Conservative governments, for a long time—because it was wrong of them to bring them over and then we find these people doing jobs that demean their abilities. That's one point I wanted to make.

The other point for me is, why bring these medical doctors to this country, where we don't use them, as opposed to perhaps not recruiting them from the very countries where they're desperately needed? These African countries—and it's not just limited to Africa that I speak of. There's one country, the name of which I can't recall, where 60% of the medical profession left that particular country to go all over the world. Yes, to Canada and yes, to Europe. How depressing, the idea that we recruit them, don't give them the job and take them away from a country that desperately needs them. It's a depressing, depressing image.

I wanted to make that point because I think we have to be very, very careful in following the ethical international recruitment guidelines in a way that simply is respectful of those individuals and is respectful of those countries that desperately need those very qualified individuals.

It speaks to the fact that we need a made-in-Ontario solution. We can't just rely on getting these international medical graduates as a way of filling the void in this province. It suggests that we need to do a heck of a lot more in our own province to make sure that we have the graduates here that are needed.

Yes, as a matter of fairness, more and more of these international medical graduates who are here should be able to practise. And yes, as a matter of justice for our own communities, we have to have a better plan that speaks to how we graduate more and more of our own doctors, especially given the shortage of doctors across this province.

But we need more than doctors. I don't have the quote in my hand, but if I can find it, I will make the point that Dr. Rachlis—here it is. Michael Rachlis, an expert on health care in Canada, was recently quoted as saying, "Even if the numbers of doctors doubled, unless we were to change the structure in which they work, Canadians would still have inadequate access."

I remind our Liberal friends that it isn't just a matter of getting more medical doctors—although that's a very useful thing to do, especially in some areas where we don't have doctors—but that we have to expand the field to other professions.

By the way, I'm reminded, as we talk about the need for medical doctors, that there is in the contract that they have to sign a line that says they're going to have to go and practise for five years in the underserved communities. I've got to tell you, that's a discriminatory practice. It's coercion of the worst kind. We're saying, "We need you, but you won't be able to practise here; you've got to go to Timbuktu to practise."

I don't know whether my Liberal friend here is laughing because he agrees with me or laughing because he disagrees. I don't know which.

We don't force regular medical doctors to go practise in the underserved areas. We say to those other poor suckers that we just roped in because we desperately need them, "You've got to go where they desperately need you." I've got to tell you, my fine Liberal colleagues, that is highly discriminatory.

I am told by one doctor who came to see me in my office that even the former Minister of Health said as much in a meeting with other international medical graduates, and he assured me there was more than one individual who heard it. And I thought, "Why would George"—I mean the Minister of Health—"say that and not do something about it?" Did he hope that the other minister would solve it rather than he who declared this to be a discriminatory practice? You could check with some of your Liberal colleagues and see what views they have on this, but you should look at that.

There's got to be a better way to compensate doctors or to reward them as a way of making sure they go where they want to be, because at the end of those five years, assuming you accept the practice of discrimination, they can say, "I'm going back to where I really wanted to be." Then you've got the same problem all over again, because people have to be in areas that they want to practise in. You just can't coerce them. It's just not a very useful practice, I suggest to my Liberal colleagues.

Beyond the idea that we need to get more doctors into the field and that colleges have a duty to work with the government, the government has a duty on its own to see what else it needs to do, and I pointed out the made-in-Ontario solution and finding ways to get more doctors into the system.

Secondly, work to make sure that we have more midwives, who are desperately sought out by many. You'd be hard pressed to find a midwife, if you happen to be pregnant and are looking for one, because there aren't that many, and those who are practising are always

practising. It would be lovely to have more midwives, given the need and the desire by women and men and those families that desperately want midwives as the caregivers for the pregnancy of that particular woman.

We are also lagging behind in the training of nurses—lagging behind. I say to you that Ontario has the second-lowest number of nurses per capita in Canada. That's not a proud legacy to leave as a Liberal government. You should be looking at that. McGuinty as well delayed the hiring of 9,000 nurses, and only last month he said we're going to have to slow that down, on top of which we include the many nurses who have been laid off from other hospitals because hospitals simply do not have enough money to keep those essential workers. Not only did Monsieur McGuinty, the Premier, slow down the hiring of nurses—and, by the way, we only have in this province 800 nurse practitioners to 23,000 physicians. So we slowed down the number of nurses that we have. I can't believe that a government would consider that a very useful strategy. Nurses and nurse practitioners are an important part of an integrated service that you provide to our community. So we can slow down the progress as we build new communities by taking such actions.

We have slowed down as well the creation of the new community health centres because of the economic concerns. We know that these community health centres are an essential part of primary care in all of the communities in Ontario. At a time when we need more of them, we have slowed down the number of those community health centres because the government, presumably, finds itself strapped or is not competently dealing with it in order to get more of them on stream where they are needed, in our community. So we have to look at how we bring in more nurse practitioners, health promoters, physiotherapists, dietitians, pathologists and the like, as part of a health human resource strategy that says health belongs not just to the doctor, but to so many others that provide an essential service to our communities.

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I want to speak as well, in the time that remains, to prevention. I am thinking about diabetes, because that was an issue that was debated just last month when the Liberals introduced a Diabetes Month bill. I thought to myself, "What a useful thing to do." Of course, people should be aware that diabetes is a growing problem. We have one million people who suffer from diabetes; and it's a growing number. It will grow by 1.3 million in the next couple of years. So it's a serious issue because it brings serious health problems to individuals who have diabetes, and if it's not well managed, some people have leg amputations as a result of it, some people have kidney failure and need dialysis, and some people's eyes fail as a result.

It's horrible; and rather than looking at what we can do to prevent it, we simply spend the money to treat the problem—diabetes 2 in particular. We spend about \$8 billion treating diabetes, and I think we spent \$5 million on prevention. It's absolutely nuts. It's the wrong way to deal with an issue that is preventable in most

cases. So as I think about that, what is the government doing about prevention? Why do we spend so much on treating problems rather than preventing them?

That's why, as a critic for education, I say that we need more physical education teachers in the classroom, not just telling teachers they should be jumping up and down with their kids for 20 minutes. We need physical education teachers who are specialized, who know what to do with students vis-à-vis their health. We know that 65% of our schools across Ontario don't have a physical education teacher. We need more community centres, not fewer. We need to have more recreation centres across the province, more child care, so families have a place where they can take their kids and the like, just to point out a couple of examples that say what it is that we should be doing by way of prevention. Simply telling people, "Oh, by the way, diabetes is a serious problem," isn't an answer. Yes, of course, we have to manage it better, but we should prevent it before it becomes a problem. I don't think we do enough of that, in my experience in this place for 18 years.

Remember, the Conference Board of Canada report ranked Ontario's health care system fifth of 10 provinces. We're in middle of the pack; again, not another proud legacy that you want to be connected to. So spending is one part of it. Spending more sometimes is not the right answer; we have to spend it more wisely. Spending just on doctors isn't the right answer either. We have to look at the broad field of other professionals who take care of people's needs. We've got to deal with poverty, because we know poverty causes a whole lot of problems, particularly for poor people and aboriginal young men, women and families. If we don't deal with that, we're going to create an ongoing, perpetual cycle of, yes, poverty, and yes, medical ill-health, leaving more and more of our people in a dire physical state, allowing governments to find more and more of the resources that we don't have to treat the problem rather than making sure that we're preventing it.

So all of that is to say this is a nice little bill, and I get to speak to what it actually does, which is to say, "It is the duty of the college to work in consultation with the minister to ensure, as a matter of public interest, that the people of Ontario have access to adequate numbers of qualified, skilled and competent regulated health professionals." I want to say that I support it. For what it does, I support it. It doesn't do much more, and perhaps Liberals might argue it wasn't intended to. It doesn't speak about the other health professionals, at least not from what I heard from the other Liberals that spoke to it, and maybe they will today, or maybe another day. Maybe it's intended to be unfolded in the good passage of time. Who knows? But as it is, it's hard to oppose it. So I wanted to say I support this bill with all of the suggestions that New Democrats have made, with our critic and myself and other speakers who will be speaking, including my colleague from Parkdale-High Park, who shall speak shortly, assuming that there are few other speakers who will stand up to speak.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I'm pleased to comment on the comments made by my colleague opposite.

Bill 97 imposes an obligation which falls upon all regulatory health professions—absolutely—but the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario stands alone as one of the colleges that needs to make additional changes to break down the barriers. The work that I was asked to undertake on behalf of the government was specifically with respect to medical doctors. No doubt there continues to be work to do on behalf of all the professions, and this bill puts in place that foundation for them to do that work. I do want to point out that many of the other professions have gone a long way to putting in place bridging programs, programs with respect to integrating foreign-trained professionals in their areas, but the College of Physicians and Surgeons, as the regulatory body, is the body responsible for setting entry to practice requirements and registering physicians in Ontario. It is the body that determines who of those who have been trained elsewhere around the world will be eligible to practise in Ontario. Whether that person resides somewhere else or resides here at the instance, it is the CPSO that is the sole conduit through which that individual will gain entry into the profession of medicine. It is for that very reason that since the introduction of this bill we've been working hard with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario to break down barriers.

As I've said previously, in a few short days, as of December 1, changes will be made and allow entry for those individuals practising in other provinces and in the United States. There is more work to do. That work continues. Bill 97 sets a foundation to allow that work to go on in the years ahead, as it should.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: The member from Toronto was eloquent and succinct.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Trinity-Spadina.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Trinity-Spadina. That's Toronto, isn't it? Well, the member from Trinity-Spadina, of course, was succinct. You know, you can trace this problem back to his government, actually, when Bob Rae reduced the number of medical students that were allowed in Ontario by 10%, although not until 1993, I think. That 10% isn't a huge number, but it was enough to tip the balance. Once you get behind the curve, it takes a tremendous amount to increase that. We increased it, I think, 15% in the late 1990s; we increased it another 10% or 12% at a later date. I think our overall increase in medical students was something like 35% under our eight years of government. Even that wasn't enough to catch up to the demands of the medical profession in Ontario. It's a moving curve.

I liked his comments—I find that I'm always a little worried when I start agreeing with the NDP, but I liked his comments about the system that we are in. His government wasn't able to change that system very much. Our government, over eight years, was not able to change

that system very much. We moved forward, I think, towards a system that would be more responsive to the needs of the community, but it's a huge, huge ministry, the Ministry of Health, and in order to change the way it operates takes a monumental effort over a good deal of time. That consistency hasn't been there as governments have changed. So, hopefully, as we move down the road we'll get more doctors, better doctors who will operate in a system that responds to the needs of Ontarians.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a pleasure to comment upon my colleague from Trinity-Spadina, most eloquent of speakers, and certainly I look forward to maybe a comment or two on this bill.

As he said, it's a very small bill. It's a baby step where a quantum leap is required in terms of the greying of Ontario and the baby boomers getting older. We know that this is a crisis waiting to happen unless we really revamp the way we look at health care in this province.

What this bill speaks to, which I think is somewhat strange, is, in very dramatic terms, what it doesn't say as well as what it does say. It seems to imply that the conversation has broken down between the government and the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and it takes a bill to begin the conversation again. I didn't realize, I don't think we on this side of House realized, that things were that bad.

Having said that, now that they've moved to make things better—not a bad idea as a first step. So much more needs to be done—far, far more, and not just about doctors. As my colleague pointed out very eloquently, it should also be about nurses; it should also be about midwives. You have to register for a midwife now at the time of conception, just about, to be able to guarantee one. It's not just about midwives. It's about community health centres where we have nurse practitioners. It's about a whole new way of looking at health. It's about prevention.

We need to do this sooner rather than later because if we think the bill is great now, just imagine in 10 years. One can see by the difference in budget between health promotion and health where this government is going. It's not interested in health promotion; it's interested in curing the sickness after the sickness occurs—and even there we're falling short. It's not only about diabetes; it's about so much more. I'm happy to speak more about this.

Again, I applaud the member from Trinity-Spadina for his thoughtful and eloquent engagement in this issue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: I do agree with the member from Trinity-Spadina when he talked about the social, moral obligation that we have not to take doctors away from developing countries and to be very careful about going down that road.

I do agree with him, also, that health care is more than just about doctors and hospitals, and that's why our government—I know Minister Smitherman was the first

minister in over a decade to increase funding to community health centres. We've got 55 new satellites opening across the province. We also have family health teams—hundreds of millions of dollars. There's a new concept of family health teams which is very important, because it's not just doctor-centred. We also increased funding for midwives, because midwives are a critical component of women's health. Also, we've created a new type of doctor's assistant, which is going to be able to get new doctors coming on stream. And in diabetes there's a whole new regime put in place, with a multi-million-dollar investment announced by the minister in the new diabetic registry, to track and to treat diabetics and to ensure that type 2 diabetics get the preventative strategies in order to ensure that they stay out of hospitals.

There are many challenges in health care, and this is one part of it. But I totally agree with the member from Trinity-Spadina that sometimes we are too doctor-centred. We all love our doctors and need our doctors, but we need to look at lifestyle, we need to look at preventive health, and we need to look at getting the proper guidance at a very young age in terms of what we eat and how we exercise, as he mentioned. These are very important things in terms of the whole spectrum, but this is one key part of it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Trinity-Spadina has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I thank all of the members who made their interventions.

I really do believe we're not spending enough on prevention; I really do. Government members can say all they want, and I think sometimes we've all failed at this as governments. We're not focused on what we could do to create better health in our society. We spend so much money on treatment. I just find it's the wrong thing to do, and we keep doing it. I know you can point to some little things that you're doing as a government. I don't want to just be critical of this government, because I think many governments have been at fault as well, but when I give you the number of \$8 billion that we spend treating diabetes versus, if I recall, only \$5 million that we spend on prevention, it should tell you something. I say this as a member of this Legislature: There's a disconnect; it's wrong. If we could be neutral as politicians, we should all be saying there's something wrong with that.

We've got to look at poverty and health. Everyone knows that if you're poor, you're going to have a lot of health problems. Study after study tells you that, yet rather than dealing with the issue of poverty, we're going to spend billions of dollars treating those poor people. It doesn't make any sense.

Yes, we support this measure. If it takes this kind of bill to get the regulatory bodies to loosen up a bit, God bless. But we've got to look at the real problems that we have in our society, and unless we do that, we're just going to waste a whole lot of money treating a disease instead of dealing with it.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: On a point of order, Speaker: I'd like to move a motion for unanimous consent without notice regarding tonight's late show.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is there unanimous consent for the member for Halton to move a motion with respect to the late show tonight? Agreed.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I move a motion that tonight's late show be moved to tomorrow night.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Halton is moving a motion to ask that the late show that was scheduled for tonight be done tomorrow night. Agreed? Agreed.

Further debate?

Hon. Michael Chan: It's my pleasure today to rise before you to talk about the importance of and my support for Bill 97, the Increasing Access to Qualified Health Professionals for Ontarians Act.

First, I'd like to applaud both the former and the current Ministers of Health and Long-Term Care for proposing this important and timely bill, along with the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore, Laurel Broten, for her extensive Report on Removing Barriers for International Medical Doctors, on which Bill 97 is based.

This issue is very closely related to my ministry. As you know, many of those internationally trained medical doctors are relatively new to this country. We call them newcomers. Serving newcomers to the fullest extent is the mandate of my ministry.

I want to share a story with you. Back in June, this summer, I was in the Ottawa area attending a bridge training program. There were 15 attendees for this program. All of them are internationally trained medical doctors. When 15 internationally trained doctors are available to meet with a politician at 10 o'clock on a weekday morning, you might suspect that something is not working to perfection. One individual told me that she was unable to get a job, even as a hospital custodian, because she was a doctor; she's overqualified. Another individual told me that on her flight to Canada to become a permanent resident, a fellow passenger had a heart attack, and she was called upon to save the life of this particular individual, which she did. That's the fortunate part. The unfortunate part was that when her plane landed on Canadian soil, she was no longer considered a qualified doctor.

I see Bill 97 as an opportunity to put an end to wasted human potential in a field that desperately needs the help. If passed, it has the potential to work hand in hand with the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act brought forward by this government in 2006 and passed in 2007. The purpose of the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act was to ensure that the skills, expertise and experience of foreign-trained professionals, including internationally trained doctors and health professionals, are properly utilized.

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Under the leadership of our Fairness Commissioner, Dr. Jean Augustine, we have made tremendous progress. So far, the Office of the Fairness Commissioner has developed guidelines for fair registration practices, submitted a report on the study of registration practices, released its first annual report back in the summer, and set up a framework for conducting audits. When the com-

missioner's mandate is fully completed, Ontario regulators will have a fair, open and accountable registration process, meaning a clean assessment of academic credentials, a timely response to all applications, and reasonable fees.

Bill 97, if passed, will ease the way for internationally trained doctors to practise in the province. It will enable the government to work with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario to amend regulations under the Medicine Act to create a number of opportunities for internationally trained medical doctors. It will streamline the registration process for doctors already practising elsewhere in Canada, in the USA, or in other countries with a comparable standard. It will also provide internationally trained doctors with transitional licensing that recognizes that many doctors can come here and begin practising with limited supervision.

The government will also be able to enhance existing programs and processes to provide a timelier and efficient assessment process for internationally trained doctors. They will be able to enhance both training and orientation programs.

We will be able to provide expanded access to individualized support for doctors trained in other systems and provide them with cultural and language education, mentorship or hands-on training. In cases where international medical graduates are not likely to get a job as a doctor, we will assist them and transition them to work in the health care system.

Bill 97, if passed, will reaffirm to Ontario's 23 regulated health professional colleges that access to health care is a matter of public interest. This bill does not place sole responsibility for access on the regulatory colleges. Rather, it acknowledges the vital role they play in helping us to implement solutions to the growing supply needs in our health care system. For that, I want to re-assure my support of Bill 97.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I want to take my minute and a half or so to speak about community health centres and their vital importance—in my riding, I have two: Parkdale Health and Four Villages—and hold out that model as perhaps a direction we can go that will help us with the health care dilemma we have in this province. I know Bill 97 is a first step, a baby step. We've said we support it; no questions there. The question is, what after Bill 97?

Right now, we have 23,000 medical doctors in Ontario and only 800 nurse practitioners. We all know the community health care example, or we should. That is an example where doctors, first of all, work on salary, where nurse practitioners do many of the jobs that doctors have traditionally done but don't need to do, and where dietitians or nutritionists, physiotherapists, psychologists and others—a host, including social workers—work together to solve the health needs of communities. That is the model that works in Quebec.

Now, the question is, why is Quebec so much further ahead in the delivery of health than we are in Ontario? Perhaps for the same reason they're further ahead on day-

care. You can get daycare for \$7 a day in Quebec. Don't tell me that doesn't have an effect on children's health—it does.

It's not just about the money from the federal government; it's about the political will. We would love to see the political will that would bring in a daycare program here, the political will that would look to the expansion of community health centres as a way of approaching medicine that costs less, delivers better medical health, and recognizes the contribution of nurse practitioners, nurses and other medical personnel as well as doctors.

So just a suggestion for the government: After Bill 97, look at community health centres, please.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Kuldip Kular: It is a great honour to speak on Bill 97, An Act to increase access to qualified health professionals for all Ontarians by amending the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991.

I'm an internationally trained medical graduate. I moved to this country in 1974. I know how internationally trained medical practitioners feel when they're not able to get into their own profession.

It took me almost a year before I was able to get into a residency program at Dalhousie University in Halifax. When I got into the residency program, I felt great. I was able to train for two, three years and then move to a Canadian hospital, into the Canadian health system. Then I was able to start practising, first in eastern Canada, in New Brunswick. Later on, I moved to the great city of Brampton.

Bill 97, if passed, will not only help internationally trained medical doctors to get into their own profession, but they would be able to get into the health care delivery professions where they can be helping the people of this province so that they can get the kind of care they deserve. Definitely, it will help us to transform our health care system from sick care to healthy care.

I think this bill should be fully supported by all sides of the Legislature of this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: This bill is a one-page bill, so there's not much in it to disagree with, and it will probably get all-party support, I would expect, but it's one that perhaps doesn't go quite far enough.

In this case, I would agree with the government—which is, again, perhaps a rare experience—that health care does need changing in this province, and perhaps small steps are the best way to go.

When introducing change, it's always a difficult concept to get people to embrace change. People get comfortable in the system they're in, even though in our system of health care we have doctor shortages; we have long lineups for critical operations; we have lineups for treatment of debilitating diseases. That just shouldn't happen.

However, if you come in and introduce large changes that are aimed at correcting these inequities or these problems in our system, all too often you get tremendous pushback from various sectors of our society, including the people who run our hospitals. Those pushbacks are not a healthy thing to have taking place in any system, including our health care system. For that reason, I think that small changes, although we need many, many of them, are a good thing to do, and continue to do aggressively over a period of time.

Certainly the shortage of doctors is a problem that is paramount to the system, obviously, but it isn't the only one. The system itself needs changing. Even if we had an adequate number of doctors, it would be very questionable as to whether those doctors could do an adequate job of health care given the system that we have in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? Seeing none, I'll return to the Minister of Citizenship, who has two minutes to reply.

Hon. Michael Chan: I want to thank my colleague from Parkdale-High Park for her comments and my colleague from Bramalea-Gore-Malton and my colleague from Halton.

I want to state that this act, Bill 97, is addressing internationally trained medical doctors, but in my speech I mentioned 23 other health professions. My ministry is also looking after the 37 regulated professions. So yes, we are working hard in other professions as well. Hopefully one day we will work on the community centres you talked about.

My colleague from Bramalea, I could feel your hardship when you were here. But then, by having you speak to the House today, maybe those hardships in the future will be lessened, that we are actually progressing to try to turn around more internationally trained doctors able to practise in this province or practise in Canada.

To from my colleague from Halton, a colleague mentioned how the previous government had 40 internationally trained doctors. We have about 300. While the number is many more, the number does not actually represent a huge number. So yes, we are quite prudent in changing or advancing this number of internationally trained doctors. We are also determined to open up changing other professions as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Mr. Bentley has moved third reading of Bill 97. Is it the pleasure of the House the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Orders of the day? I recognize the Minister of Government Services.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I move adjournment of the House.

Speaker of the House: Mr. McMeekin has moved the adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House the motion carry? Carried.

The House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1643.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.
 Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Steve Peters
 Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller
 Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum
 Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Aggelonitis, Sophia (LIB)	Hamilton Mountain	
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Arthurs, Wayne (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Attorney General / Procureur général
Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (LIB)	London West / London-Ouest	
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / Ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Broten, Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Brown, Michael A. (LIB)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development / Ministre du Développement économique Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Carroll, Hon. / L'hon. M. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	Minister of Culture / Ministre de la Culture Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (LIB)	Essex	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances Minister of Revenue / Ministre du Revenu

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby—Oshawa	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (LIB)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora—Rainy River	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Hoy, Pat (LIB)	Chatham—Kent—Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West—Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest—Glanbrook	
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges—Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (LIB)	Brampton—Springdale	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (NDP)	Welland	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Kular, Kuldip (LIB)	Bramalea—Gore—Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean—Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga—Brampton South / Mississauga—Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity—Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough— Westdale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa—Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Carol (LIB)	Huron—Bruce	
Moridi, Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	
Munro, Julia (PC)	York—Simcoe	
Murdoch, Bill (IND)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Naqvi, Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
Oraziotti, David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pendergast, Leeanna (LIB)	Kitchener-Conestoga	
Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (LIB)	Elgin-Middlesex-London	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (LIB)	Scarborough-Agincourt	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres
		Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches-East York	Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de parti reconnu
Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of International Trade and Investment / Ministre du Commerce international et de l'Investissement
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Ramal, Khalil (LIB)	London-Fanshawe	
Ramsay, David (LIB)	Timiskaming-Cochrane	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland-Quinte West	
Runciman, Robert W. (PC)	Leeds-Grenville	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Ruprecht, Tony (LIB)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Monique M. (LIB)	Nipissing	Minister of Tourism / Ministre du Tourisme
		Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Deputy Premier / Vice-premier ministre
		Minister of Energy and Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Énergie et de l'Infrastructure
Sorbara, Greg (LIB)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton-Mississippi Mills	
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto-Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga-Erindale	Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services / Ministre des Petites Entreprises et des Services aux consommateurs
Van Bommel, Maria (LIB)	Lambton-Kent-Middlesex	
Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (LIB)	Ottawa West-Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest-Nepean	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Wilkinson, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Perth-Wellington	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe-Grey	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)	Kitchener-Waterloo	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
		Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke	
Zimmer, David (LIB)	Willowdale	

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Tim Hudak
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Garfield Dunlop
Gilles Bisson, Kim Craitor
Bob Delaney, Garfield Dunlop
Tim Hudak, Amrit Mangat
Phil McNeely, John O'Toole
Lou Rinaldi
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

Chair / Président: Pat Hoy
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jean-Marc Lalonde
Sophia Aggelonitis, Ted Arnott
Wayne Arthurs, Toby Barrett
Pat Hoy, Jean-Marc Lalonde
Leeanna Pendergast, Michael Prue
Charles Sousa
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

Chair / Présidente: Linda Jeffrey
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: David Oraziatti
Robert Bailey, Jim Brownell
Linda Jeffrey, Kuldip Kular
Rosario Marchese, Bill Mauro
Carol Mitchell, David Oraziatti
Joyce Savoline
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

Chair / Présidente: Julia Munro
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Michael A. Brown, Kevin Daniel Flynn
France Gélinas, Randy Hillier
Lisa MacLeod, Julia Munro
David Ramsay, Liz Sandals
Maria Van Bommel
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Douglas Arnott

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

Chair / Président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jeff Leal
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Christine Elliott
Peter Kormos, Jeff Leal
Reza Moridi, Yasir Naqvi
Lou Rinaldi, John Yakubuski
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité
permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

Chair / Président: Bas Balkissoon
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Kevin Daniel Flynn
Laura Albanese, Bas Balkissoon
Bob Delaney, Joe Dickson
Kevin Daniel Flynn, Sylvia Jones
Norm Miller, Mario Sergio
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

Chair / Président: Norman W. Sterling
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jerry J. Ouellette
Laura Albanese, Ernie Hardeman
Andrea Horwath, Phil McNeely
Jerry J. Ouellette, Liz Sandals
Norman W. Sterling, Maria Van Bommel
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Michael Prue
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Paul Miller
Bas Balkissoon, Mike Colle
Kim Craitor, Gerry Martiniuk
Paul Miller, Bill Murdoch
Michael Prue, Tony Ruprecht
Mario Sergio
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vic Dhillon
Laurel C. Broten, Vic Dhillon
Cheri DiNovo, Helena Jaczek
Dave Levac, Shafiq Qadri
Khalil Ramal, Laurie Scott
Peter Shurman
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

Select Committee on Elections / Comité spécial des élections

Chair / Président: Greg Sorbara
Howard Hampton, Greg Sorbara
Norman W. Sterling, David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

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